



# **PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR A GROWING CHURCH**

By David Webb

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# Table Of Contents

<b>Practical Guidelines for a Growing Church: An Introduction</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Personal Evangelism</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Ministering to the Saints</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>The Pattern for Church Growth</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>First Things First: Personal Growth</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Growing in Grace and Knowledge</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Why First Century Churches Grew</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Preparing to Labor in the Vineyard of the Lord</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Developing a Heart of Compassion</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Developing a Heart of Service</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Develop a Life Devoted to Prayer</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Develop a Love for the Word of God</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>Developing Skills to Handle God's Word Correctly</b>	<b>26</b>
<b>A New Testament Pattern for Ministering to the Saints</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>The Work of the Evangelists</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>The Work of Elders and Deacons</b>	<b>31</b>
<b>The Work of the Saints</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Essential Ingredients for Ministering to the Saints</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Performing Works of Service</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>A New Testament Pattern for Evangelism</b>	<b>45</b>
<b>Teaching the Devout</b>	<b>46</b>
<b>Approaching the Devout</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>They Preached Jesus</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>The Church in the Plan of God</b>	<b>50</b>
<b>They Devoted Themselves to Prayer</b>	<b>51</b>
<b>They Tailored Their Message</b>	<b>53</b>

---

Examples of Tailoring the Message	53
God Gave the Increase	53
Following the Example of Jesus in Teaching	57
The Methods Jesus Used	57
The Methods We Often Use	61
Chart: Comparing the Two Methods Most Commonly Used	64
Finding the Lost	67
How do we Find People and How do we Approach Them?	70
Handling Objections	74
Teaching the Lost	79
How Do I Prepare?	80
Helpful Guides in Teaching Others	81
The Materials	83
Answering Questions	88
Eight Types of Questions	88
Effective Ways of Answering Questions	91
Moving Toward the Moment of Decision	95
Preparing for the Moment	96
Moving the Study to the Point of Decision	97
Teach, Baptize then Teach Again	102
Conclusion: Be Strong, and Work!	110
Appendix: Lesson Outlines and Charts	116
The Inspired Word of God Chart	117
Comparison of Manuscript Evidence Chart	118
Reliability of the Old Testament Chart	119
Three Dispensations of Time Chart	120
Three Dispensations of Time Outline	121
Our Need for a Savior Chart	128

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<b>Examples of Conversions Chart</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>Searching for the New Testament Church Chart</b>	<b>130</b>
<b>Churches (Denominations) Today Chart</b>	<b>131</b>
<b>The Empty Tomb Chart</b>	<b>132</b>
<b>The Empty Tomb Outline</b>	<b>133</b>
<b>Lord, Liar or Lunatic Chart</b>	<b>140</b>
<b>Lord, Liar or Lunatic Outline</b>	<b>141</b>
<b>Cost of Discipleship Outline</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>Heaven and Hell – The Final Judgment Chart</b>	<b>148</b>

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# Practical Guidelines for a Growing Church

## An Introduction

We are witnessing an increasing emphasis being placed on church growth. Far too many congregations are either experiencing a leveling in weekly attendance, or they are actually seeing a decline in the number of people attending worship services. Even congregations where growth has become somewhat stagnant realize that unless something is done soon, their numbers will also begin to decline as a result of people moving out of the community, or through members falling away.

It is not uncommon to find churches today that are one-third to one-half the size they were ten to twenty years ago. And with the decline, come a host of other problems. For example, some congregations are finding it increasingly difficult to attract families with children, since many parents are naturally drawn to larger churches where their children will have others with whom they can associate.

Some churches are also finding it difficult to financially support their own local preacher with an adequate salary and benefit package, and this creates a whole new set of problems. These congregations are generally forced to select from a narrower field of preachers who are either capable of raising “outside” support, or who are willing to work part time to help support themselves. This, in turn, means that the local preacher must now be concerned with how long the “outside” support will continue, and what will happen to his family if the support suddenly stops. Or, he must concern himself with how effective he will be in his work if he has to divide his time between the Lord’s work and supporting his family through a part time job.

There is also one other very negative aspect to this whole scenario. The growing number of churches that cannot adequately support a gospel preacher has caused some good men to become discouraged and reluctantly leave full time preaching for work in the secular world. Unfortunately, this shortage of quality preachers opens the doors of opportunity to others who have not taken their work seriously, and have done far more harm as gospel preachers than good.

In an effort to stem the tide of declining membership, many churches have frantically tried a number of solutions, none of which seem to provide the desired results. For example, some congregations change preachers on a fairly regular basis in hopes of finding someone who has the personal charm and charisma to attract a larger audience. Others have launched campaigns to do mass mailings of bulletins, initiated Bible correspondence courses that are advertised in

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local newspapers, or publish weekly newspaper articles. Some have even purchased telephone systems that automatically place calls to area residents with recorded messages inviting them to services. Still others have attempted to organize personal work programs of one type or another within the local congregation, or have invited special guest speakers to hold classes on personal evangelism. And yet, after all these efforts, attendance seems to remain about the same, or continues to slowly decline.

What's the solution? Churches in the denominational world are experiencing growth. Statistics show that more and more people are attending worship services today than even ten years ago, and there is a growing spiritual awareness among people in every part of the country.

So, why isn't the Lord's church growing? We can attempt to satisfy our own consciences by saying many of these people are drawn more by the entertainment value of religion than they are by the simple truth of the gospel, or that they are more interested in having some kind of religious experience than they are in faithfully follow the precepts of God's Word. While that may be true for some, it's certainly not true of all, and perhaps not even for the majority. People everywhere are beginning to sense a real emptiness in their lives and are genuinely seeking meaningful relationships with others whom they can truly call "friend." They are also seeking stability in their lives. They are looking for real, concrete values upon which they can take a firm stand, and they are searching for answers to the most important questions of all: "what happens to me after I die?" We can offer them stability. We have real, concrete values. And we know the answer to the question of what happens after death. So, why aren't people coming to us? The answer is a very simple one, but one that is also most disturbing. In all honesty, we have failed in two of the most important areas affecting church growth — personal evangelism and ministering to the saints.

## **Personal Evangelism**

Sadly, we have done little to personally speak to the lost about Jesus Christ and His church. Instead, we evangelize each other. We preach to ourselves. We hold gospel meetings to encourage one another. But we aren't consistently reaching out to those around us who are dying in their sins. All the personal evangelism classes, and all the special meetings to train people in personal work will accomplish nothing if those classes and training programs are not being followed through with action. Instead of imitating the pattern for church growth recorded in the Scriptures, we often busy ourselves with every other method for reaching the lost. We too easily forget that the real power of God unto salvation is still contained in the simplicity of the gospel of Christ, and that we are the one and only vessel through which that message is carried to a lost world.

Try to image how successful the first century church would have been if the apostles and early Christians simply mailed out bulletins to the lost, or published articles in the local newspaper, or mailed out Bible correspondence courses to those interested, or simply relied on gospel meetings to accomplish the desired results. If growth had occurred at all, it would have been slow. And yet, three thousand were converted to Christ on one day (Acts 2:41).

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Then the number grew to five thousand a short time later (Acts 4:4). That number grew to become “multitudes” (Acts 5:14), and even the “multitudes” were multiplied (Acts 6:1). Then instead of the church growing arithmetically, it actually began growing geometrically. Numbers kept multiplying, and soon the gospel of Christ had spread throughout the entire known world (Colossians 1:6, 23). And amazingly enough, the church grew without a single bulletin mail-out campaign, without a host of Bible correspondence courses, and probably without a single article being published in a local newspaper. While people in the first century certainly came to hear the gospel preached in what we might call a gospel meeting, even that method of public teaching wasn’t the reason most turned to Christ.

The New Testament pattern of teaching the lost is as pure and simple as it gets, and by far the most effective, because it’s a method designed by God, employed by the Lord, and used most effectively by His disciples. What is it? It’s simply being totally committed to the truth of the gospel and living it in our own lives first, then sharing it with others on a one-to-one basis.

There is no magical formula for success, nor are there any secret strategies to winning the lost to Christ. It’s simply letting “your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16), and “speaking the truth in love” (Ephesians 4:15). First century Christians sought to arouse in others a realization of their lost condition, then guided them into an understanding of God’s wonderful plan of salvation.

Like Jesus, these early Christians had an overwhelming compassion for lost souls, and went forth proclaiming the Word with a clearly defined sense of purpose: “to seek and save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). They simply sowed the seed and left it to God to give the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6). How well the seed of the Word was received depended entirely on the heart of the recipient, not upon the talents and abilities of the sower (Matthew 13:18-23). As long as the Word of God was being preached, the seed was being sown. And first century Christians clearly understood the basic principle of sowing and reaping — those who sow sparingly will also reap sparingly, and those who sow bountifully will also reap bountifully. Bountiful reaping comes from bountiful sowing. Is it any wonder that as these saints “went everywhere preaching the Word” (Acts 8:4), churches began springing up all throughout the Roman Empire? Their bountiful sowing resulted in the bountiful reaping of lost souls for Christ.

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## Ministering to the Saints

But church growth doesn't begin and end with personal evangelism. From the day of Pentecost on there was a common thread running through the growth scenario of the New Testament church. It was perhaps the single most important element that cemented the rapidly growing church together, and served as the impetus for future growth. This critical ingredient is best summarized in the words of the apostle Paul as he described the saints in Macedonia. They "first gave themselves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God" (2 Corinthians 8:5).

The element that prompted such staggering growth during the first century is simply described as "ministering to the saints," and was faithfully demonstrated by first century Christians who sacrificially responded to the needs of their brothers and sisters in Christ. No one thought of the things they possessed as belonging exclusively to them, because they were motivated by a heart of compassion and caring to serve one another. This sense of oneness was not only seen in their common faith, but in their common care and concern for each other. It had been the subject of the Savior's prayer (John 17:20-21), and was constantly stressed in the writings of Paul, Peter, James and John (1 Corinthians 12:14-27; 1 Peter 4:8-10; James 1:27; and 1 John 3:17-18).

First century saints were not only committed to the Lord, they were committed to one another. They responded to the material, emotional and spiritual needs of each other by giving to one another, loving one another, and by bearing one another's burdens and exhorting one another. They knew the secret of developing a servant's heart, and practiced one of the most frequently stated commandments, to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 5:43; 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31-33; Luke 10:27; Romans 13:9; Galatians 5:14; James 2:8). They understood that if Jesus "loved the church and gave Himself for it" (Ephesians 5:25), they should likewise love their brothers and sisters in Christ to the extent that they would be willing to do the same – "By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John 3:16). A sacrificial spirit and a servant's heart, that's what characterized the saints of the first century, and that's what prompted the unprecedented growth of the Lord's church.

## The Pattern for Church Growth

There lies the pattern for us. Church growth today can be achieved in the same manner as it was in the first century. Like them, we must be totally committed to the truth of the gospel, then live it out in our own lives by sacrificially serving one another and by taking the message of Christ to a lost and dying world. When we've achieved that level of maturity, then we will be successful in promoting growth within the body of Christ.

But unless an overriding commitment to Jesus Christ is lying at the center of our hearts, motivating everything we think, do or say, we will never be completely successful in convincing

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others to have that same kind of commitment. Therefore, it begins with personal commitment, not personal evangelism. Anyone who is personally committed to being a true disciple of Jesus Christ will have no problem with the personal evangelism part of the equation. Personal evangelism comes naturally to personally committed, self-sacrificing and loving people. Committed Christians will say, like the apostle Paul, “for necessity is laid upon me; yes, woe is me if I do not preach the gospel” (1 Corinthians 9:16). They will be driven by a compelling realization that without the gospel, precious souls will be lost.

So, church growth begins with personal growth: growing in the “grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18) – growing in our love for the Lord; and growing in our love for our neighbor and for one another. When the child of God grows spiritually, the church grows spiritually. And when the church grows spiritually, it can’t help but grow numerically.

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# First Things First: Personal Growth

**INTRODUCTION:** The Scriptures are filled with statements regarding the wisdom and the reward of saving souls. “The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, and he who wins souls is wise” (Proverbs 11:30). “When I say to the wicked, ‘You shall surely die,’ and you give him no warning, nor speak to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life, that same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood I will require at your hand. Yet, if you warn the wicked, and he does not turn from his wickedness, nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but you have delivered your soul” (Ezekiel 3:18-19). “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:3). “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20).

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**T**he growth of the New Testament church is completely dependent upon our efforts as members to teach the lost, to restore those who have fallen away, and to edify one another. However, none of this will take place until we first develop a genuine love for the lost and for each other. Growth within the church of the first century was achieved through an intense evangelistic spirit, and by Christians showing genuine, heart-felt care and concern for one another. These two elements worked hand-in-hand to bring the lost to Christ, and to keep them there during the difficult times that would follow. Sadly, far too little is being done in either area today. As a result, the church is not growing in many places, and even declining in others.

A church that puts forth an evangelistic effort to reach the lost, but lacks a genuine loving concern for its members is doomed to failure from the start. While some may be converted through the valiant efforts of a few, those new Christians probably won't remain part of the local body for long. The reason is simple – they won't be receiving the constant nurturing every newborn child of God needs. At best, this kind of church will only remain stagnant in their numerical growth, simply replacing those members who drift away or die. Likewise, a church that emphasizes a loving care and concern for its members, but makes no efforts to take the saving message of the gospel to others is also doomed to die. As the members grow older, they may be drawn closer to one another, but they aren't drawing others to Christ through the preaching and teaching of the gospel. Sooner or later the average age of the members begin to increase, while the numbers of members begin to decline. Sadly, they essentially become a congregation that is literally loving itself to death.

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Remove either essential ingredient – an evangelistic zeal toward the lost, or loving care and concern for the redeemed – and church growth will simply grind to a halt.

So, why do we have problems with these two essential areas that directly impact church growth?

As far as evangelistic zeal is concerned, there are two fundamental reasons why more members of the body of Christ are not involved in teaching the lost.

- **Many simply do not know enough about the Scriptures to effectively teach the lost.** Fortunately, this problem can be easily overcome. Every Christian who is serious about personal growth can learn how to effectively teach the lost.
- **Many have lost sight of the fact that men and women all around us are hopelessly dying in their sins, and we hold the cure within our hands.** This problem can also be overcome by simply learning to develop a genuine love for the lost, and by doing what Jesus told His disciples to do: “Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest” (John 4:35).

Regarding our lack of mutual care and concern for one another, there is perhaps one main reason why more are not involved in this effort.

- **We’ve become too preoccupied with meeting our own needs, and give little thought to serving the needs of others.** We’ve become self-serving rather than other-serving, and we’ve allowed the cares and worries of this world to choke out those portions of the Word that speak of our loving our neighbor as ourselves. As a result, the body of Christ has become fragmented rather than a cohesive whole – the hand cares little about the needs of the eye, and the ear is too preoccupied to worry much about the foot (cf. 1 Corinthians 12:14-27). Fortunately, this problem can also be overcome by simply taking the first step of putting the needs of others before our own, and by lovingly giving of our time and energy in caring for one another – meeting the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Therefore, before the church can grow, we must grow. But where do we start? The apostle Peter suggests two critically important areas where every Christian needs to grow – grace and knowledge. He wrote, “Grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” (2 Peter 3:18).

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## Growing in Grace and Knowledge

Growth is not an option for Christians, it's a command. Earlier in his second letter, Peter said, "Giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love" (2 Peter 1:5-7). After listing these areas of personal growth, Peter concluded, "For if these things are yours and abound, you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 1:8). Before we can "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ," the virtues listed in 2 Peter 1:5-7 must be in us and abound!

Therefore, to be effective in reaching the lost and edifying one another in love, we need to focus our personal growth as Christians in two specific areas: "grace and knowledge." Grace without knowledge cannot effectively convict the sinner, and may even lead some to wrongly conclude there is really no need for a change in their life. Likewise, knowledge without grace can make us appear "holier than thou," and turns many away from the message of forgiveness. We must strive to always maintain a balance between grace and knowledge.

But how do we develop grace? A gracious and loving attitude toward others can only come when we truly see ourselves as the Lord really sees us. "All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way..." (Isaiah 53:6). In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus spoke a parable to "some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." He contrasted a Pharisee, who confessed sins of which he was not guilty and boasted of his devotion to God, to a lowly tax collector who stood afar off, would not even lift his eyes to heaven, smote himself on the breast, and humbly prayed, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" Jesus said, "this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." When we look at those around us who are living in sin, we need to say to ourselves, "There, but for the grace of God, go I!" If it were not for God's love and grace, we would be in the same place as the most wicked sinner – lost and separated from God. It is only when we truly see ourselves as sinners who still need God's grace that we can lovingly and graciously reach out to others who have the same need. Only then will we not be afraid to reach down to even the lowest levels of humanity, because we will see ourselves as no better than they, and we understand that Christ died for them as well.

How do we gain knowledge? Developing a "knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" comes only one way – through a serious effort to learn all we can about *the man* and *the plan* from the pages of Scripture. Peter wrote, "As newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the Word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). Unfortunately, many never progress beyond this point in their lives as Christians. This was true among first century Christians as much as it is of us today. In fact, the Hebrew writer strongly rebuked those in his day who had not matured: "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk

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and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the Word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil” (Hebrews 5:12-14). Spiritual maturity, and the knowledge that comes with it, can only be achieved through a level of Bible study that goes well beyond “first principles,” by putting into practice the things we learn from God’s Word, and through regular discernment between right and wrong. It is certainly true that we cannot teach what we do not know. Nor can we lead others to “the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ” if we have not made those two key ingredients an integral part of our lives.

When we have grown “in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ,” church growth will follow. Why? The apostle Paul listed several reasons in his letter to the Ephesian church (Ephesians 4:11-16).

- **Equipping saints.** Church growth comes by “equipping the saints for the work of ministry.” The edification of the body of Christ can only come when members are properly equipped to perform works of service, and are willing to do their part in accomplishing that goal. God gave gifts to the church (apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors [elders], and teachers) for the purpose of providing the members with the tools they need to do the work of ministry. These tools are distributed through the work God designed for apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors (elders) and teachers to perform. That work includes teaching and preaching the Word of God, and through that teaching and preaching, they edify and strengthen the saints to do their work. Paul goes on to describe the work saints are to perform as the work of “ministry.” Encompassed in the word “ministry” is the concept of service and servant-hood. It means serving the needs of others, whether those needs be material, emotional or spiritual. But the work of service and ministry cannot be performed by a few while others sit on the sidelines and observe. Everyone who is a “saint” is to be “equipped... for the work of ministry.” A saint who does not “minister,” is a saint who is not doing their work.
- **Spiritual maturity.** Church growth will also be achieved by our coming “to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect [complete] man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.” “Unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God” can only come through an intense study of God’s Word. This is how we become “perfect” (complete) and attain the “stature of the fullness of Christ.” The apostle Paul told Timothy, “All Scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Notice how a knowledge of Scripture is able to make a man “complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work!” When we undertake a diligent study the Scriptures we learn all we need to know “for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.” That brings us into a “unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God.” We will no longer be like “children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of

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doctrine.” We will know the truth, and with that knowledge we will be able to speak “the truth in love.” We will be able to lovingly speak that truth to those outside of Christ who have never heard the gospel, as well as to those within the body who need our encouragement and nurturing.

- **Cooperative work.** Church growth also comes when “every part does its share.” The apostle Paul said this “causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” Sadly, to many, Christianity has become nothing more than a spectator sport, where only a few are on the field, actively struggling against the forces of wickedness, while the rest watch from the safety of the grandstands. But the Lord intends for every Christian to do their part in the work of service. For it is only when “every part does its share,” that the body of Christ will grow and be capable of edifying and uplifting itself in love.

## Why First Century Churches Grew

When we carefully examine the character of Christians of the first century, it’s easy to see why churches sprouted up everywhere and grew into strong, healthy congregations.

- **They prayed (Acts 2:42; 4:24, 29; 6:4).** First century Christians relied heavily on prayer because they understood they could not successfully do the Lord’s work alone. They understood it was the Lord who had given them their success (Acts 11:21), and they constantly prayed for His intervention.
- **They sacrificed.** These saints clearly understood that to be a disciple of Christ meant being willing to give up everything to follow Him (Luke 14:25-33). They understood everything they had belonged to the Lord anyway, and saw themselves as only temporary custodians of those possessions. Therefore, when they experienced loss, they saw themselves as simply giving up what really belonged to the Lord – things the Lord had allowed them to enjoy temporarily. This is why we see first century Christians first giving themselves to the Lord’s work, then giving of their financial resources (2 Corinthians 8:5).
- **They remained steadfast.** Nothing could deter these saints from their commitment to Christ and to the Word of God. Beatings and threats of death couldn’t deter them (Acts 5:42). And even when they fled for their own safety from areas where persecution had grown to a fever pitch, they still went everywhere preaching the Word (Acts 8:4).
- **They loved one another.** Learning to love one another with a pure heart fervently came easy for these Christians, and there are several reasons why. First, no one considered anything they possessed as their own, and they willingly shared it with other Christians who were in need (Acts 4:32). Second, they worked at keeping the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace (Ephesians 4:2-3). And third, they learned to

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forgive one another, just as God in Christ had also forgiven them (Ephesians 4:31-32; Matthew 6:9-15).

- **They encouraged women to play a major role.** While being careful not to teach or usurp authority over a man (1 Timothy 2:11-12), women of the first century actively participated in teaching others the gospel of Christ (Acts 18:26), and were even jailed for their efforts (Acts 8:3-4). They also played other key roles in the growth and development of the church. They did good works and charitable deeds (Acts 9:36), they prayed for special needs (Acts 12:12), and they worshipped with other women (Acts 16:14).
- **They defended the truth against error.** When doctrinal issues arose within the church, or when disagreements threatened to destroy peace and unity, these Christians earnestly contended for “the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints” (Jude 3). They were willing to openly discuss differences as long as it was done in a civil and loving manner (2 Timothy 2:23-26).
- **They were respected.** Although they often found themselves at odds with religious and political leaders who tried to stop the spread of Christianity, these first century saints were, nevertheless, respected by the common people (Acts 2:47; 5:13). They obviously conducted their lives in such a way as to earn the respect of those around them.
- **They spread the Gospel of Christ.** Because these Christians were completely committed to the Lordship of Jesus Christ, they felt compelled to share the good news about the death, burial and resurrection of Christ with others. As a result, the church grew from 3,000 on Pentecost (Acts 2:41), to about 5,000 a short time later (Acts 4:4), to multitudes of both men and women (Acts 5:14), to multitudes being multiplied (Acts 6:1). The reason they were so successful is because they prayed, they sacrificed, they remained steadfast, they loved one another, they encouraged women to play a major role, they defended the truth against error, they were respected, and they spread the Gospel of Christ. They had grown in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and were willing to do the works of service for which they had been equipped – each and every member doing their part for the growth of the body.

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# Preparing to Labor in the Vineyard of the Lord

**INTRODUCTION:** Unfortunately, far too many believe teaching the lost, or the work of edifying the saints within the body, is a job best left to “professionals,” or to those teachers within the church who have taught for years and have that special “talent” for imparting the Word to others. We have forgotten that the power of the gospel of Christ is not in the person presenting it, but in the message itself. However, since the task of reaching the lost involves eternal issues, and since ministering to the saints must be done out of genuine love to avoid being phony and superficial, it is wise to make certain preparations if we truly intend to be most effective. What are some things we can do in preparing ourselves to be a laborer in the vineyard of the Lord?

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Over and over again, the Scriptures speak of the compassion of Jesus – compassion toward those who were sick, those who had nothing to eat, those who wept over the loss of a loved one, and especially toward those who were lost in sin. Jesus also taught several parables that dealt with the theme of compassion. The parable of the Unforgiving Servant – who was forgiven of his enormous debt, but who showed no compassion to one who owed him a small, insignificant debt (Matthew 18:21-35, esp. vs. 27, 33). The parable of the Good Samaritan – who saw a wounded man that others were passing by, and had compassion on him and took care of him (Luke 10:25-37, esp. v. 33). The parable of the Prodigal Son – whose father saw him returning home while he was still a great way off, had compassion on him, ran and fell on his neck and smothered him with kisses (Luke 15:11-24, esp. v. 20).

Of all the acts of compassion we see in the life and ministry of Jesus, one stands out head and shoulders above the others. In his gospel account, Matthew writes, “But when He saw the multitude, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest”” (Matthew 9:36-38).

Try to imagine sitting beside Jesus as He looked out on the throngs of people who surrounded Him, only to have Him turn to you and say, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” What would be your response? Jesus saw the multitude as being “weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.” He was “moved with compassion for them”

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because He realized that unless someone reached them with the message of hope, they would remain lost and eventually die in that condition. Therefore, compassionate Jesus told His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few”

## Develop a Heart of Compassion

There is so much work to do in the Lord’s vineyard, but there are so few to do it. The reason is simple. There are so few who see the lost with the same heart of compassion as Jesus saw them. “Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” The Lord desperately needs those who have developed a heart of compassion to see and respond to those who are “weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd.”

Here are three ways we can develop a genuine heart of compassion for the lost.

- **“Lift up your eyes and look at the fields...” (John 4:35).** We must get our attention off of ourselves and truly lift up our eyes and look intently on the fields all around us. When we do, we will see ourselves surrounded by souls dying in sin. We will also see those within the body of Christ who are dying from a lack of proper care. We must force ourselves to look into the faces of men and women and realize we are looking into the faces of people destined for eternal torment unless we do something.
- **Imagine their tormented cries.** In the story of the rich man and Lazarus, Jesus said the rich man cried out to Abraham, “I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him (Lazarus) to my father’s house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment” (Luke 16:27-28). Those lost in torment have no way to redeem themselves, and they certainly don’t want anyone those they love to end up where they are. The lost are pleading for us to reach their loved ones while there is still time. Try to imagine what it would be like to hear the tormented cries of those who are lost, pleading for us to reach their loved ones who are still alive.
- **Learn to appreciate the value of human life.** The value of human life can be seen in many ways:
  - **By its nature and origin:** God created man in His own image, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Genesis 1:27; 2:7).
  - **By the duration of its existence:** We are destined to live forever, and will either go away to eternal life or to eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46).
  - **By the cost of its redemption:** We have not been redeemed by perishable things such as silver and gold, but by the precious blood of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:18-19). Jesus was willing to give His life to redeem the world. This means He even laid down His life for those we think are unworthy of that sacrifice.

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- **Understand that the fate awaiting the lost is real.** Jesus said, “He who believes in Him (the Son of God) is not condemned; but he who does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God” (John 3:18). John wrote, “He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son does not have life” (1 John 5:12). Hell is not some imaginary place, nor is it some place where the lost will experience only discomfort and displeasure. The Scriptures tell us of “weeping,” “wailing” and “gnashing of teeth” in a place described as “outer darkness.” Eternal and unimaginably horrible. And unless we can develop a heart of compassion for the lost we will be there too.
  - **Realize that more Christians are lost to the world through neglect than through any other means.** All too often those who have drifted away from the Lord are heard to say, “no one ever cared enough to call or personally find out why we stopped coming to church.” They became discouraged because of certain circumstances in their own lives that caused them to lose their focus, and they slowly drifted away. But that discouragement was further compounded by the fact that no one seemed to care about them enough to bring them back. Unlike the sheep in Jesus’ parable who was brought back by a shepherd who couldn’t stand to lose even one, these sheep are simply written off by shepherds who are content with the 99 who remain. Sadly, the fate awaiting those who have abandoned their first love will be far worse than for those who never knew the Lord. Imagine how horrible it would be to spend eternity in torment knowing we had eternal life in the grasp of our hands – and simply let it go.

## Develop a Heart of Service

In addition to developing a heart of compassion, we need to develop a heart of service. When the disciples of Jesus were arguing among themselves as to who was the greatest, Jesus said, “...whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave; just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:26-28). Greatness in the kingdom of God is measured by our willingness to serve.

The greatest gift that anyone can give is to give of themselves. That’s what Jesus did, and that’s what He expects of His disciples. Those who give of themselves have only one thing in mind – how they may serve others without expecting to be served in return.

Here are some guidelines in developing a servant’s heart:

- **Renew your mind.** In Romans the 12th chapter, the apostle Paul speaks of the need to renew our mind so that we may be useful in our service to others (Romans 12:1-2). A renewed mind is one that thinks differently. It’s a mind that does not allow someone “to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith” (Romans 12:3). It’s a mind

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that understands there is a place and a function for every member of the body of Christ, and one that seeks to find its place of service (Romans 12:4-8).

- **Esteem others better than yourself.** In Philippians chapter 2, the apostle Paul speaks of the need to “let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not for his own interests, but for the interests of others” (Philippians 2:3-4). Paul is not suggesting we develop an “inferiority complex,” but rather place the interests of others above our own. Then he says, “Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ, who...made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a servant...” (Philippians 2:5-7) A servant’s heart puts the needs of others first. (See: 2 Corinthians 12:15)
- **Model the character traits revealed in the Beatitudes.** In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus listed eight character traits that should be found in the life of every disciple (Matthew 5:1-12). When all eight character traits found in the Beatitudes are mixed together in our life, the heart of a servant emerges. A true servant of God mourns over sin in his own life as well as in the life of others. He is gentle. He hungers and thirsts for righteousness. He is merciful to others. He is pure in heart because he thinks on pure things. He is a peacemaker, who not only seeks to make peace between men, but between man and God. He happily endures persecution for the sake of righteousness. And he rejoices because he knows his reward in heaven is great.

In perhaps the greatest lesson Jesus taught on the subject of servant-hood, the Savior gently and humbly set about to wash His disciples’ feet (John 13:3-11). It was customary for a servant to kneel with a pitcher of water and a bowl to wash the feet of every visitor to his master’s household, especially since the roads and alleys of Israel and Jerusalem were unpaved and dusty. If the household could not afford a servant, either the host or one of the early arriving guests would humbly assume the role and wash the feet of those who came in. But on this night, none of the disciples of Jesus had volunteered for that lowly task. The room was filled with proud hearts and dirty feet. Therefore, Jesus needed to teach these men a final lesson about servant-hood. Unless they learned this lesson, they would never be effective in humbling themselves to take the message of the Cross to a lost and dying world.

From what Jesus did, three observations about being a servant emerge.

- **Being a servant is demonstrated, never announced.** Jesus didn’t say, “I’m now going to demonstrate servant-hood – watch my humility.” Rather, He quietly removed His tunic, took a towel, a pitcher and a bowl of water, and began to wash His disciple’s feet. The servant does not attempt to draw attention to himself nor to his acts of service. He quietly demonstrates his servant-hood in a humble manner, and never makes a boastful proclamation about his acts of sacrifice. He simply does what all servants do – graciously serve the needs of others.

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- **Being a servant means being able to receive as graciously as we give.** Peter was too filled with pride to allow Jesus to wash his feet. Therefore, Jesus replied, “If I do not wash you, you have no part with Me” (John 13:8). The heart of a genuine servant is a heart empty of pride. It allows one to accept the gracious acts of others without feeling guilty, or feeling the need to repay. While it is truly more blessed to give than to receive, a servant’s heart is genuinely humble enough to also accept a gift as graciously as it is given.
  - **Being a servant is not a sign of inner weakness, but of incredible strength.** When Jesus finished the task of washing His disciple’s feet, He asked, “Do you know what I have done to you?” (John 13:12). He then proceeded to state His role of authority among them as “Teacher and Lord.” Then He said because He had washed their feet, “you also ought to wash one another’s feet” (John 13:14). No doubt, His disciples expected to hear Him say, “because I washed your feet, you should wash Mine.” But that’s not what He said. Even the most pride-filled Christian would jump at the chance to wash Jesus’ feet, but only those empty of pride would stoop to wash the feet of his fellow man. Servant-hood requires incredible inner strength to willingly humble ourselves to serve even the most basic needs of others. That’s the example Jesus left.

After the disciples of Jesus learned this lesson of servant-hood, they were prepared to do two things – “go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15), and lovingly respond to the needs of “one of the least of these My brethren” (Matthew 25:34-46). Servants should have no difficulty obeying the commands of their masters. The reason so many of us resist complying with the command of Jesus to take the Gospel message to a lost world, or caring for the needs of even the least of all saints, is simply because we haven’t quite developed the heart of a servant. If the apostles of Christ had never learned this lesson, chances are they would have never sacrificed themselves to proclaim the gospel of Christ to others, and we would still be in our sins. How many people are still in their sins because of us? And if the apostles had not learned to serve, we would have never seen the examples of sacrificial service in the lives of men like Peter, Paul, and other first century Christians who first gave of themselves to the Lord, then gave to others.

One last thought! From what Jesus taught about humility and servant-hood, His disciples would never again consider anyone so far beneath them that they couldn’t stoop to the lowest person and share with them the message of the gospel of Christ, or minister to their needs. When we truly learn this lesson, neither will we.

## **Develop a Life Devoted to Prayer**

Another aspect of preparing ourselves to labor in the vineyard of the Lord is to develop a life devoted to prayer. Prayer must play an important role in our efforts to teach the lost, especially since salvation of the soul is not a human work, but a divine work. Prayer must

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also play a crucial role in ministering to the needs of others, especially since the Lord can do far more than we can with our own limited abilities. And since Jesus wept and prayed over the lost and the disheartened, then His servants should follow His example and do the same.

To accomplish more in our efforts to share the gospel with others, there are a few things for which we should be praying, and there are some ways to make our prayers more effective:

- **Pray for courage to speak for Christ.** If the apostles felt it necessary to pray “...grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your Word” (Acts 4:29), what makes us think we should not also be praying for boldness to do the same. Paul asked the Ephesians to pray, “for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel” (Ephesians 6:19). This will not keep us from occasionally making mistakes and perhaps saying the wrong thing, but it will keep us from making the worst mistake of all – saying nothing! A lack of courage to speak for Christ is one of the major obstacles every Christian must overcome. The only way we can have the victory over this fear is to do as Paul and the other apostles did – pray for courage that we may open our mouth “boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel.” If we’ve done our part in preparing ourselves to teach others through a study of God’s Word, He will answer that prayer.
- **Pray that our efforts to reach the lost will not be hindered.** The apostle Paul asked, “Finally, brethren, pray for us, that the Word of the Lord may have free course...” (2 Thessalonians 3:1). Paul also urged the church at Colosse to pray “for us, that God would open to us a door for the Word, to speak the mystery of Christ... that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak” (Colossians 4:3-4). Since Jesus prayed for the lost, we can also pray that the Lord help us in our efforts to reach the lost by ensuring that our efforts will not be hindered, and we can pray that the Lord open to us a door for the teaching of the Word. How the Lord opens doors through His divine providence is not for us to understand. All we are asking is that the Lord help us find an open door (a heart that is prepared to receive the truth), or help prepare a heart so that its reception of the truth will not be hindered. How many times have we seen a heart that was once closed to the Word of God suddenly open up to receive the Word?
- **Pray for the salvation of lost souls.** The apostle Paul wrote, “...my heart’s desire and prayer to God for Israel is that they may be saved.” While Paul recognized they had a “zeal for God,” that zeal was “not according to knowledge.” They were ignorant of God’s righteousness and had gone about to establish their own righteousness, not submitting themselves to the righteousness of God (Romans 10:1-3). How many good, moral and religious people fit this same description today? The apostle Paul understood the only way the people of Israel could be saved was through the preaching and teaching of the gospel of Christ (cf. Romans 10:14-17). The same is true for the good, moral and religious people of our day who have not obeyed the

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gospel. Therefore, like Paul, we should pray for opportunities to share the gospel with those who will be most receptive, and pray that these lost souls will be saved.

- **Pray and not give up or lose heart.** In Luke chapter 18 the Lord taught a parable, saying, “man always ought to pray and not lose heart” (Luke 18:1). The parable went on to describe a woman who continually brought her petition before a judge until he finally did as she requested (Luke 18:2-8). The lesson Jesus attempted to teach His disciples was that if an unjust judge will grant the petition of a persistent widow, God as our righteous Judge will do even more for those of us who bring our petitions to Him day and night – even though He may not answer our prayers immediately. The Puritans had a saying about prayer: “Foolish boys that knock at the door in wantonness, will not stay until someone cometh to open them; but a man that hath business will knock and knock again until his call is answered.” If we “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) for God to help us in reaching a particular lost soul, He will honor that prayer. God will not force someone to accept the gospel against their will, but He will help us put forth our best effort in trying to reach them. And who knows? The Lord may bring about circumstances in the life of that person that will make them more receptive to the gospel in the future, than they were when we first approached them. Therefore, we need to keep asking, seeking and knocking for the Lord to give us the “good things” we need (Matthew 7:7-11).
- **Pray in faith and without doubting.** James says when we pray, we must “ask in faith, with no doubting...” (James 1:6) Why? Because those who doubt (those who lack confidence in God’s promises), will not receive anything from the Lord (James 1:7). This principle not only applies to our requests for wisdom, but for anything else we may need to help us in our efforts to reach the lost. The Hebrew writer explains why those who lack confidence in God’s promises receive nothing. He writes, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarded of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6). How can we ever expect the Lord to honor our requests if we doubt He has the power or the desire to answer our prayers?
- **Pray in keeping with God’s will.** Not everything we pray for is in keeping with God’s will. Although we may never fully understand why, the Lord sometimes answers our prayers with “no.” Therefore, it’s essential that we pray as Jesus did in the Garden of Gethsemane when He said, “not as I will, but as You will” (Matthew 26:39). However, there are certain things we know that are in keeping with God’s will. For example, we know that the Lord is “not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9). This should give us confidence when we pray for the Lord’s help in reaching the lost. It is the Lord’s desire that all be saved. Furthermore, we have this promise: “Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He

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hears us, whatever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we have asked of Him” (1 John 5:12-15).

To be most effective in the Lord’s vineyard, we should:

- **Pray for specific people.** As we have already seen, the apostle Paul repeatedly requested prayers on his behalf (Ephesians 6:18-20; Colossians 4:2-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:25; 2 Thessalonians 3:1). He also prayed for others (Philippians 1:3-4; 2 Thessalonians 1:11-12). When Peter was in prison, the saints in Jerusalem were praying for him (Acts 12:5, 12). Likewise, we should be praying for specific people when we truly desire to be effective. Unfortunately, we develop a generic kind of prayer in which we often pray “for those whom it’s our duty to pray.” But praying for the specific needs of others focuses our attention on specific individuals – especially when we ask for God’s specific intervention in helping us meet their needs. Praying for specific individuals also draws us closer to them as we pour out our hearts to God for their sake.
- **Pray for God’s help in comforting others.** In the opening remarks of Paul’s second letter to the church at Corinth, he describes God as, “the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). One of the reasons we go through various trials in life is make us more helpful in ministering to those who are going through similar trials. We can extend to them the same comfort God extended to us during our ordeal. What kind of comfort is that? The word “comfort” in this passage means “to stand beside, or to call along side.” That’s the way God comforted us. He stood beside us during our darkest moments. And that’s how we can comfort others in the same way – standing beside them with hope and encouragement while they endure trials and tribulations.
- **Pray for wisdom.** James says, “if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him” (James 1:5). Wisdom is essential in our being effective in ministering to the needs of others, especially in ministering to their emotional and spiritual needs. Wisdom is often defined as the ability to effectively put our knowledge to use. So, it stands to reason that we cannot effectively exercise wisdom without first having knowledge. And the knowledge to thoroughly equip us “for every good work” comes from a study of God’s inspired Word. Wisdom has also been described as the ability to see things from heaven’s point of view – to understand that God may have a purpose we don’t understand. While we may not understand why certain things happen to us in life, we can take courage in knowing God has a purpose (Romans 8:28), and we can help others develop that same perspective through the wisdom God grants us.

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## Develop a Love for the Word of God

Another key ingredient in preparing ourselves for laboring in the Lord's vineyard is to develop a love for the Word of God. As we mentioned earlier, there is an old axiom that says, "we cannot teach what we don't know." This is as true with teaching the gospel of Christ as it is with anything else. There is simply no way we can impart an understanding of the Word of God if we don't know it ourselves. Herein lies the greatest obstacle in our efforts to teach the lost and comfort the suffering – we don't feel comfortable enough with our knowledge of the Word of God to adequately share it with others. Therefore, rather than say something wrong, or say something that may prompt a question we cannot answer, we say nothing at all. However, by developing a genuine love for the Word of God we can overcome this obstacle and assume the role the Lord intended for us as laborers in His vineyard.

In time, everyone should be able to teach others about Jesus. The Hebrew writer severely rebuked certain first century Christians for their lack of spiritual growth that made them incapable of teaching others the gospel of Christ. "For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskilled in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are of full age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil" (Hebrews 5:12-14).

Some never grow beyond "the first principles of the oracles of God." They are incapable of digesting anything "solid" in the Word of God because they are still spiritual infants. This is why Peter tells us, "as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby" (1 Peter 2:2). There must first be a desire for the "pure milk of the word" before we can expect to grow. When we have a sincere desire to know the things of God nothing will keep us from achieving the goal of spiritual growth. And once we have matured in our own understanding of the Word we will be capable of teaching it to others.

Those who teach the Word of God must also be prepared to accept the consequences. James says, "my brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment" (James 3:1). James is not attempting to discourage us from teaching, but is warning those of us who teach to be very aware that God will judge us more closely because He will not only judge us on the basis of *what* we teach, but also on the basis of *how* we teach it. The reason teachers will "receive a stricter judgment" is explained by the fact that all teachers use the one instrument of the body that is impossible to tame – the tongue (James 3:8). Just as one carelessly discarded match can set ablaze an entire forest, one careless attempt to teach someone the gospel of Christ can lose a soul to hell.

Sadly there are always those who rush into teaching without adequate knowledge or adequate preparation. The apostle Paul warned Timothy that there were those in their day who were "desiring to be teachers of the law, understanding neither what they say nor the

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things which they affirm” (1 Timothy 1:7). Times haven’t changed! Does this mean we should avoid the risk of saying the wrong thing, and simply say nothing at all? Absolutely not! Rather, we should take whatever steps are necessary to grow spiritually so we can teach. But we also need to be careful what we teach and how we teach it, knowing that we will incur a stricter judgment.

The Word of God is a powerful instrument that can be effective to the converting of the soul if used properly, or it can destroy if used carelessly. There are several admonitions in the Scriptures about our need to “be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Timothy 2:15), and warnings that “...the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12).

## **Develop Skills to Handle God’s Word Correctly**

Assuming we have spent time reading and meditating on the Word of God, there are some rather simple ways we can develop the skills necessary to handle the Word correctly. Psalm 119 provides a number of wonderful guidelines for developing these skills. Here are just a few examples:

- **We must be undefiled and walk in the law of the Lord (Psalm 119:1-11).** We cannot be skillful in using the Word of God if we are not living according to its precepts. To solve this problem, the psalmist says, “Oh, that my ways were directed to keep Your statutes! Then I would not be ashamed, when I look into all Your commandments” (Psalm 119:5-6). The most effective cure against sin is by heeding the Word, seeking God’s will with all our hearts, and then treasure the Word of God in our hearts. Once we have done that, we will be able to effectively help others cure the sin in their lives.
  
- **We must pray for the Lord to open our eyes to understand the wonderful things in His law (Psalm 119:18, 25-27, 33-34).** Jesus recognized that many would never come to understand His teachings because “in them the prophecy of Isaiah is fulfilled, which says: ‘Hearing you will not hear and shall not understand, and seeing you will not see and not perceive; for the heart of this people has grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their heart, and turn, so that I should heal them.’” (Matthew 13:14-15; cf. Isaiah 6:9-10). If we are truly seeking to know the will of the Lord, we can understand the things of God if we are willing to pray that the Lord open our eyes, and teach us His statutes, and give us understanding so that we may keep His law and observe it with our whole heart.
  
- **We must meditate on God’s Word (Psalm 119:97-104).** Those who truly desire a deeper love for God’s Word will spend time meditating on the Lord’s

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commandments, testimonies, and precepts. Through them we gain wisdom and understanding – two crucial elements needed in our efforts to reach the lost and in ministering to the needs of others. Meditating on God’s Word involves more than simply reading a chapter or two each day. We need to allow these truths to sink down deep into our hearts by thinking about the significance of every word and phrase we read. The deeper we search in the Word for wisdom and understanding, the greater our wisdom and understanding will be. Meditating on the Lord’s commandments, testimonies, and precepts is God’s way of teaching us what we need to know to teach others.

- **We must speak of God’s commandments to others (Psalm 119:117-174).** The most effective way to deepen our love for the Word of God is to share it with others and see the joy it brings them. As the Lord has taught us through His Word, so we must also teach others. And we can have confidence in what we teach because we know God’s commandments are righteous. When we put forth the effort to share the Word of God with others, the Lord will be with us. As the psalmist prayed, “let Your hand become my help” (Psalm 119:173), so we can also pray for the Lord’s hand to be involved in our efforts to reach the lost with the saving message of the gospel of Christ.

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# A New Testament Pattern for Ministering to the Saints

**INTRODUCTION:** Shortly after the New Testament church began flourishing, problems arose over the care of those whose basic needs were being neglected. We are told, “as the number of the disciples was multiplying, there arose a complaint against the Hebrews by the Hellenists, because their widows were neglected in the daily distribution” (Acts 6:1). Up to this time, the apostles had been assuming the oversight of receiving and distributing money to care for the material needs of the rapidly expanding number of disciples. But the task was quickly growing beyond their ability to handle effectively. As a result, some were beginning to “fall through the cracks” by being overlooked. Besides, there was a more pressing need for the apostles of Jesus Christ. Their primary mission was not to tend to the needs of each individual saint, it was to preach and teach the gospel to a lost world. They quickly realized “it is not desirable that we should leave the word of God and serve tables” (Acts 6:2). There were others who could focus their attentions on taking care of the problem at hand while the apostles focused theirs on a far greater need. To solve the problem, the apostles told the brethren to “seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business; but we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word” (Acts 6:3-4).

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The work of ministering to the saints is a key element in the growth of the New Testament church. It involves nurturing the physical or material needs of others as well as caring for their emotional and spiritual needs. A nurturing church is a growing church because there is mutual care and concern for everyone within the local body. Unfortunately, the main reason why people leave one congregation for another is because one or more of their basic needs are not being met.

However, just as growth in the first century church could not be accomplished solely by the work of the apostles, neither can we accomplish growth in the New Testament church today by expecting the local preacher to do all the work of evangelism as well as ministering to the needs of the saints. It is no more “desirable” for the local preacher to “leave the word of God and serve tables” than it was for the apostles.

## The Work of the Evangelist

The role of the evangelist is clearly outlined by the apostle Paul in his first letter to Timothy. “I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the

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living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables. But you be watchful in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry” (2 Timothy 4:1-5).

Evangelists, along with elders and teachers, were given to the church for the purpose of “equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4:11-12). It is vitally important that the evangelist does not make the mistake the apostles warned against and “leave the word of God and serve tables.” Rather, he should give himself “continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.” (Acts 6:2-4).

Too often, the local preacher is so busy visiting the sick, caring for the needy, as well as providing for other needs of the members that there is no time left to adequately do the work of an evangelist. Part of the problems lies in a misunderstanding of the work of the evangelist. It is not uncommon for members of the local congregation to perceive the preacher as an employee of the church who has been hired to take care of whatever needs to be done. Sometimes, the preacher himself thinks of his work the same way.

The local preacher should never perceive his role as simply doing a couple of sermons and teaching a couple of Bible classes each week, then being on call 24-7 to respond to the every material or physical need of the church. Neither should the members. While the local preacher certainly has a responsibility to visit the sick, care for the needy, and provide for other needs of the members, his responsibility in these areas is no greater than any other member of the church. He does these things because all Christians do them – NOT because he is an evangelist. If he is doing his job properly, the preacher has a monumental task in prayer and ministry of the word – teaching the lost, teaching new converts, teaching those who have fallen away, teaching and equipping the saints for the work of ministry in the church. The church that removes the evangelist from the work God has given him, and relegates him to the denominational concept of a “pastor,” is guilty of perverting God’s plan for the New Testament church. Preachers are not “pastors” in the Lord’s church.

## **The Work of Elders and Deacons**

Fortunately, the Lord’s wisdom has provided the church with an effective means of caring for the physical or material, as well as the emotional and spiritual needs, of our fellow saints. This care comes through the work of elders and deacons.

Elders are specifically ordained as the spiritual shepherds of the Lord’s flock, and have been given the duty of tending to the physical (material) needs, and the emotional and spiritual needs of the flock under their care. Unfortunately, not enough elders are assuming that God-ordained role, and others don’t even know how.

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The apostle Peter wrote, “The elders who are among you I exhort, I who am a fellow elder and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that will be revealed: Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock; and when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that does not fade away” (1 Peter 5:1-4). The seriousness of this duty is seen by the specific qualifications a shepherd must possess if he is to shepherd the Lord’s flock effectively (1 Timothy 3:1-7; Titus 1:5-9). As a spiritual leader, one on whom we can depend to provide us with the spiritual guidance we need, an elder must not only meet these qualifications, but must also understand that the Lord will hold him accountable for sheep that are lost through carelessness or neglect (Hebrews 13:17; Ezekiel 34; Jeremiah 23:1-4). Simply put, God has placed the exclusive oversight of the local church into the hands of the elders, not the preacher or any other man.

Furthermore, elders are to be “examples to the flock.” As shepherds, the elders must be at the forefront of the work of the church, leading the flock by their own example of faithfulness. They go before the flock leading by their own example in all areas of work within the church. If an elder is not leading by example, he is not properly doing his job of shepherding the flock. In the process of leading by example, elders are to plan the work of the church, oversee the worship and work of the church, care for those under their charge by responding to their individual needs, and properly discipline any member in error (even to the extent of withdrawing fellowship). The qualifications of elders outlined by the Lord give us some insight into their responsibilities – the responsibility of teaching, exhorting, admonishing, reproofing and rebuking.

The apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders, “take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood” (Acts 20:28). It is not enough for elders to simply watch out for their own welfare, they must also “take heed... to all the flock,” and must “shepherd the church of God.” To do this, shepherds must know the flock, and become thoroughly acquainted with each and every sheep under their care. Elders must be watchful, ever alert to the physical and spiritual needs of those they shepherd, and they must be capable of meeting those needs.

However, just as the apostles could not adequately and efficiently respond to every need by themselves, neither can elders. Therefore, the Lord authorized the appointment of others who would serve the needs of the church in a special way. These are deacons. While elders have the oversight of the local congregation, there are many things that need to be done within the church that can be delegated to deacons. It has often been said that elders are to care for the spiritual needs of the church while deacons tend to the material needs. But that distinction is not made in Scripture. The qualifications set forth for deacons would likewise qualify them to handle spiritual needs under the oversight of the elders (1 Timothy 3:8-13). Deacons are simply servants who are appointed to assist the elders in any task for which they are qualified.

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But like the men appointed in Acts chapter 6 to “serve tables,” deacons have a God-appointed duty to serve as well – serving in any capacity for which they are uniquely qualified by their own talents and abilities. And since many of their qualifications parallel those of the elders, they are uniquely qualified to help the elders in a number of areas.

Therefore, the exclusive task of overseeing the fold of God is given to the elders of the church who are assisted in their work of ministering to the saints by deacons. That’s God’s plan!

## The Work of the Saints

However, the task of ministering to the needs of others is not given exclusively to the elders and deacons. It is a task we all share in common. Every member (including the evangelist) has a part in the work of the local church and needs to work diligently for the benefit of all (Romans 12:3-16). We cannot simply wait for someone to assign us a work. If there is work that needs to be done, then we need to do it. As one elder put it, “It’s a poor farmer who can’t find something to do.”

A congregation where members are serving the needs of “one another” is a growing, thriving work. The Scriptures are filled with what are commonly called “one another passages.” These verses speak of the need to respond to “one another” in very specific ways.

Here are a just few examples of “one another passages,” as well as other related Scriptures.

- **Love one another.** “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:34-35; also see John 15:12, 17; Romans 12:10; 1 Peter 1:22). John tells us how we are to love: “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18).
- **Bear one another’s burdens.** “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). Several Scriptures tell us how we can bear the burdens of others: “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15; also see Romans 15:1; 1 Corinthians 12:25-26; James 1:27).
- **Confess our sins to one another.** “Confess your trespasses to one another” (James 5:16a).
- **Pray for one another.** “Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16; also see Acts 1:14; Acts 2:42; Ephesians 6:18).

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- **Exhort one another.** “And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.” (Hebrews 10:24-25; also see Romans 14:19; 1 Thessalonians 5:11-14; 1 Timothy 4:13; Hebrews 3:13).
  - **Admonish, Reprove and Rebuke one another.** “Now I myself am confident concerning you, my brethren, that you also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another” (Romans 15:14; also see 1 Thessalonians 5:14). Jesus taught how we are to admonish, reprove and/or rebuke one another: “Moreover if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” (Matthew 18:15-17; also see Galatians 6:1; 2 Thessalonians 3:15; 2 Timothy 2:23-26; 4:2).
  - **Serve one another.** “For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Galatians 5:13-14; also Galatians 6:9-10; Ephesians 4:12, 16; Hebrews 6:10; 10:24; 1 Peter 4:10-11) Several Scriptures speak of ways first century Christians served one another (Acts 9:36-39; Romans 12:13; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; Titus 3:13-14; Hebrews 13:16).
  - **Teach one another.** “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” (Colossians 3:16-17; also Colossians 1:28; Titus 2:3-5). Paul gives one primary reason for teaching others: “And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.” (2 Timothy 2:2).

## Essential Ingredients for Ministering to the Saints

What are the essential ingredients that must be in the life of anyone who would minister to the saints? When the apostles realized it would be inappropriate for them to “leave the word of God and serve tables,” they told the brethren, “seek out from among you seven men of good reputation, full of the Holy Spirit, and wisdom whom we may appoint over this business” (Acts 6:3).

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Three key ingredients emerge from this passage as being essential in the life of everyone who would minister to the saints.

- **Good reputation.** A good reputation is seen in the life of those who live out in their lives the gospel of Christ they profess with their tongues. There is consistency between their faith and their conduct. They do as Jesus commanded His disciples in the Sermon on the Mount: “Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven” (Matthew 5:16).
- **Full of the Holy Spirit.** Some believe this is a reference to a miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit, or to a supernatural, personal indwelling. However, being filled with the Spirit is equated in the New Testament with letting the Word of Christ dwell in us in all wisdom (Ephesians 5:18-19 compared to Colossians 3:16). Therefore, to be filled with the Spirit means to be filled with the power, influence and authority of the Spirit through the Spirit-given Word of God. Those who are filled with the Spirit are knowledgeable of God’s Word and are capable of using it.
- **Wisdom.** Those who would be effective in ministering to the needs of others must have wisdom to exercise tact, sound judgment and discernment. James tells us wisdom is acquired by simply asking God (James 1:5). As we mentioned earlier, wisdom is often defined two ways. One definition of wisdom is the ability to see circumstances and events in our lives from heaven’s point of view – to understand that God has a design and a purpose for everything, whether or not we comprehend the purpose. A second definition of wisdom is the God-given ability to put to use the knowledge we’ve gained through God’s Spirit-given Word. Regardless of how we define it, wisdom is an essential ingredient in ministering to the needs of others.

## Performing Works of Service

One of the most common problems effecting church growth is that we don’t realize there are works of service we can perform – regardless of our age or experience. Essentially, we all have needs in one or more of the following areas: physical or material needs, emotional needs and spiritual needs. There are a number of examples in the New Testament of how first century saints responded in each of these three areas. Perhaps a closer look at some of these Scriptures will prompt some ideas of how we can serve one another in these same areas.

- **Responding to the physical and material needs of others.** First century saints were characterized by their sacrificial giving to the needs of others. They even went to the extent of liquidating some of their possessions to have money to give to the care of their brothers and sisters in Christ. Their mutual care and concern in responding to the physical and material needs of others can best be seen in the words, “nor was there anyone among them who lacked” (Acts 4:34). Here are only a few examples and teachings concerning the way first century saints responded to the physical and material needs of others.

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- **Tabitha:** A certain disciple named Tabitha (Dorcas) was described as being “full of good works and charitable deeds which she did” (Acts 9:36). Although the “good works and charitable deeds” of Tabitha are not specifically mentioned, we can assume they included the making of various “tunics and garments” for others – possibly for those who could not afford them.
  - **Cornelius:** As a centurion and the first Gentile convert to Christ, Cornelius was known as “a devout man and one who feared God with all his household, who gave alms generously to the people, and prayed to God always” (Acts 10:2). He was a man who had achieved a certain amount of material prosperity, and was willing to share it with others who had need. He was already practicing what the apostle Paul would later tell Timothy to urge all wealthy saints to do: “Command those who are rich in this present age not to be haughty, nor to trust in uncertain riches but in the living God, who gives us richly all things to enjoy. Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.” (1 Timothy 6:17-19). But this command was not just to those who had been blessed with abundant material wealth. It’s to every working man and woman. “Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labor, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need” (Ephesians 4:28).
  - **James:** In what is believed to have been the first letter written to the church, James, the Lord’s brother, explained to his readers that “pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27). The word “visit” in this passage means “to inspect, to look upon, care for... to visit with help” (Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words). Social service programs were non-existent during the first century. Therefore, it was the responsibility of every individual Christian to care for the needs of those who could not care for themselves – including orphans and widows. The words “visit orphans and widows in their trouble,” speaks of direct and personal involvement by individual Christians, not institutional care. It speaks of directly and personally responding to their specific needs, and not of relegating them to the care of some impersonal institution that may provide for their material needs, but can never meet their emotional or spiritual needs through the warmth of a touch, the encouragement of kind words, and the solace of a tender embrace.
  - **Responding to the emotional needs of others.** We are living in an age that is rapidly becoming devoid of love, friendship and compassion. Neighbors may live next door to each other for years, never developing anything more than a casual acquaintance – if they even develop an acquaintance at all! People all around us are starved for love, and are longing to have someone they can simply call their friend. It should not be surprising that most of those who walk through the doors of our

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church buildings are primarily looking for friendship and companionship to fill the emptiness in their lives. They want to have friends on whom they can depend, and whose moral values speak of fidelity, trust and commitment. They also want their children to have this same kind of moral and ethical friendship among their peers, and therefore come to the only place where they believe they can find what they're searching for – a caring, loving church.

However, loneliness isn't just found in the world around us – it's also found in the church. There are countless numbers of Christians who aimlessly drift from congregation to congregation looking for love, friendship and compassion as well. They know the truth, they love the Lord, but their lives are void of a warm touch and a heart-felt embrace. They are lonely, forgotten, depressed, discouraged, and disheartened. And before long, they will simply disappear – and, sadly, no one will notice or even care.

Here are a few examples of those in the Scriptures who took special care to minister to the emotional needs of others – a ministry that is most urgently needed in the body of Christ today.

- **Barnabas:** Barnabas, whose name is literally translated “Son of Encouragement” (Acts 4:36), is a wonderful example of one who repeatedly responded to the emotional needs of others. In addition to encouraging others by providing for their material needs (Acts 4:36-37), Barnabas sought out and found Saul of Tarsus who was still viewed with suspicion by Christians who knew of his former life (Acts 11:25). When he found him, Barnabas brought the former persecutor before the church in Antioch and gave Saul the encouragement he needed to begin fulfilling his mission as a chosen vessel for Christ (Acts 11:26). Barnabas worked closely with Paul during the first missionary journey and encouraged him to take his rightful place as a chosen apostle to the extent that the order of their names, “Barnabas and Saul,” soon became “Paul and Barnabas” (Acts 13:1; 42). As the second missionary journey was about to begin, Barnabas tried to give young John Mark a second chance after he left Paul and Barnabas during the first journey and returned home (Acts 13:13; 15:36-37). Barnabas wanted to encourage John Mark, but Paul didn't have time or patience to nurture someone less committed than himself. Their differences resulted in Barnabas taking John Mark on a separate missionary journey, while Paul chose a new traveling companion, Silas (Acts 15:38-40).
- **Paul:** In his opening remarks to the second Corinthian epistle, the apostle Paul describes God as “the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort those who are in any trouble, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4). The word “comfort” in this passage comes from the Greek “paraklesis” which means to call to one's side, and to give exhortation and

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consolation. The apostle Paul describes God as the One whom we called along side during times of trouble, and in responding to our call, He extended to us exhortation and consolation (comfort). Now, says Paul, it is our turn to stand along side of others who are in times of trouble, and extend to them the same exhortation and consolation which God gave to us.

- **The Corinthian Saints:** In the first Corinthian letter, Paul dealt with a serious sin in the church that needed immediate action (1 Corinthians 5:1-13). The church needed to withdraw fellowship from a brother who was living such a publicly immoral life that it would soon devastate the entire church unless something was done. The result of their action had the desired effect. The man repented and wanted to be restored. But some apparently still harbored ill feelings toward this brother to the extent that he was being consumed by his sorrow. Therefore, Paul wrote in his second epistle to the Corinthian church that, “this punishment which was inflicted by the majority is sufficient for such a man, so that, on the contrary, you ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one be swallowed up with too much sorrow. Therefore I urge you to reaffirm your love to him” (2 Corinthians 2:6-8). Genuine forgiveness and comfort, as well as a reaffirmation of our love is essential in keeping those who repent of sins from becoming depressed and discouraged, and from slipping back into the world.
- **Mark:** Toward the end of Paul’s life, when the aged apostle sat in a lonely prison cell in Rome, he needed comfort and consolation. He had been forsaken by one close friend, Demas, and had sent others out to do their work of ministry (2 Timothy 4:10, 12). With only Luke to keep him company, Paul wrote a tender plea to his son in the faith, Timothy, and asked him to “come to me quickly... do your utmost to come before winter” (2 Timothy 4:9, 21). But there was one other person Paul wanted Timothy to bring with him – John Mark. No doubt, Paul knew Barnabas had been right all along about young John Mark. By patiently working with young John Mark, Barnabas had given him the courage he needed to stand for Christ. In the process of his growth, John Mark had also learned to be a source of comfort and encouragement to others. And so, Paul writes to Timothy asking him to “get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry” (2 Timothy 4:11). John Mark would prove to be a source of comfort and encouragement to Paul in his final years, because he had learned first-hand the fine art of giving comfort and encouragement from Barnabas years earlier.

“Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15). “For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ... And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it.” (1 Corinthians 12:12, 26). Mutual burden-bearing as members of the body of Christ is essential for the growth and welfare of the church. We “rejoice with those who

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rejoice,” while at the same time being willing to stand beside those who are troubled and “weep with those who weep.” And just as our whole body aches when one of its members are hurt, so it should be in the body of Christ – “if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it.” Nothing can be more encouraging than to have friends who genuinely share our burdens and show loving compassion to us during times of discouragement, sorrow, and loneliness.

Encouragement is one of the greatest services we can perform for those who are facing the challenge of discouragement and disappointment in their lives. There are always those who say “it can’t be done,” or “we’ve tried that before and it failed.”

But try to imagine how different our world would be if certain people had listened to the words of discouragement rather than the words of encouragement that spurred them on to achieve great things. Here are a few examples:

- “Far too noisy... far too many notes.” – The Emperor Ferdinand after hearing the first performance of Mozart’s *The Marriage of Figaro*.
  - “If Beethoven’s Seventh Symphony is not by some means abridged, it will soon fall into disuse.” – Philip Hale, Boston Music Critic, 1837.
  - “Rembrandt is not to be compared in the painting of character with our extraordinary gifted English artist Mr. Rippingille.” – John Hurt (1775-1848).
  - “Flight by machines heavier than air is impractical and insignificant... utterly impossible.” – Simon Newcomb (1835-1909).
  - “You will never amount to very much!” – A Munich schoolmaster to Albert Einstein.
  - “We don’t like their sound. Groups of guitars are on their way out.” – A DECCA Recording Company executive who refused to sign The Beatles to a recording contract in 1962.
- **Responding to the spiritual needs of others.** Ministering to the spiritual needs of others can cover a wide array of special works we can perform for our brothers and sisters in Christ, and even those who are not members of the body of Christ. These works include teaching the lost, restoring the erring, gently correcting those who are in error, reproving and rebuking sin in the lives of others, and helping those who are new in the faith to press on to maturity in Christ. Those who undertake the task of responding to the spiritual needs of others must first have their lives in tune with the gospel of Christ before they attempt to help others. They must also develop the character seen in the life of Jesus as He patiently, gently and lovingly planted His truths into the hearts of His hearers.

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Here are a few examples of how we can likewise respond to others in this unique way:

- **Confronting sin:** There will always be the need to lovingly confront those who are in sin, especially among our own brothers and sisters in Christ. Jesus gave us a specific method to employ in performing this all-important task. First, “if your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear, take with you one or two more, that ‘by the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established.’ And if he refuses to hear them, tell it to the church. But if he refuses even to hear the church, let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.” (Matthew 18:15-17). Notice that the process begins between “you and him alone,” then if necessary, it progresses to taking one or two more along before the matter is finally brought before the attention of the church as a whole.

Second, Jesus warns “why do you look at the speck in your brother's eye, but do not consider the plank in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck from your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye? Hypocrite! First remove the plank from your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.” (Matthew 7:3-5). Sinless perfection is not required of those who would minister to the spiritual needs of others in this manner — only a unique awareness of our own weaknesses, and a willingness to right any wrongs in our own lives before attempting to right the wrongs in the lives of others. This is why the apostle Paul wrote, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted.” (Galatians 6:1).

- **Restoring the erring:** There will also be those who, for one reason or another, wander away from the truth of the gospel of Christ – whether they drift into sin, or into religious error. James says there are eternal consequences involved in responding to the needs of those in this category. “Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:19-20).

Jude also speaks of those who have been led into sin by false teachers, saying “on some have compassion, making a distinction” (Jude 22a) – that is, on some make a distinction, realizing they have been innocently misled into believing error. However, “others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire” (Jude 22b). While some are led into error innocently, others deliberately made the choice to follow false doctrine. With these, we need to be careful – snatching them out of the fire, if possible, in such a way as to not get burned ourselves. In every case, we need to understand that a “servant of the Lord must not quarrel but be gentle to all, able to teach, patient, in humility correcting those who are in opposition, if God perhaps will grant them repentance, so that they may know the truth, and that

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they may come to their senses and escape the snare of the devil, having been taken captive by him to do his will.” (2 Timothy 2:24-26).

- **Supporting the weak:** Helping those who are new Christians press on to maturity is one of the greatest works of ministry we can perform. It involves nurturing those who are weak in the faith and unlearned in the Word of God, and gently bringing them to a level of maturity where they can assume their rightful place as a worker in the vineyard of the Lord. The close association between Jesus and the twelve provides a good example of this, as does the work of Barnabas with Paul, and Paul’s work with Timothy. The apostle Paul gives some excellent guidelines for those who wish to undertake this all-important ministry. “Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things” (Romans 14:1). “It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak” (Romans 14:21). “We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves” (Romans 15:1). “To the weak I became as weak, that I might win the weak. I have become all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). “Now we exhort you, brethren, warn those who are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, uphold the weak, be patient with all” (1 Thessalonians 5:14).

Those who truly desire to labor in the Lord’s vineyard will always have something to do. There will be people to visit, saints to encourage, members to help, brothers and sisters to restore, and new Christians to nurture. The tasks are truly endless. Just remember one thing – if it’s Scriptural, and it works, then DO IT! Don’t be bound by the traditional thinking that our responsibilities to one another begin when we enter the church building, and end when we leave.

Here are a few suggestions that may be helpful in starting the work of edification within a local congregation, and in spurring others to join the efforts of ministering to the saints.

- **Prayer-Discussion Meeting.** Encourage a special, regularly scheduled, meeting of members to openly discuss the physical, emotional and spiritual needs of those within the congregation as well as those without. The purpose of this meeting should be to focus on those who need visiting, special prayers, encouragement, teaching, admonishing, and who may be good candidates for home Bible studies in an effort to either restore them or lead them to Christ. Make a list of the names mentioned and put them into the appropriate category (such as “Need to Visit,” “Need Encouragement,” “Need Special Prayers,” etc.), and pass the list out to those who attend the meeting so they can keep their own records. Above all, encourage everyone to pray for those mentioned.
- **Visitation Program.** There are generally several people in most congregations (both men and women) who are available for a few hours once a week to team up with other members to visit those in the church with various needs. All that’s needed is for

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someone to organize the effort. One suggestion would be to have everyone meet together first as teams to assign the names of those needing visiting (assign two or three names to each team). Then, discuss the particular needs of each person on the visitation list, pray as a group for their specific needs, call them to let them know the approximate time of your visit (be sure to stay on schedule), and finally, go visiting. After the visit, write down a few notes about that person's particular need so you can pass that information on to the team visiting this person next time. This simple type of visitation program can be done weekly, bimonthly, or monthly, depending on the size of the congregation and the number of persons needing visits.

- **Special Young People Home Meetings.** Young adults, teenagers and pre-teens in the church are our greatest resource for future growth and development. They have special needs as well as unique talents and abilities that are best addressed in a home atmosphere. Encourage meetings in the homes of various members where these groups can be brought together for the purpose of singing spiritual songs, praying, openly discussing topics that are of special interest to them. These groups can also undertake special projects to help others – including going as a group to the home of elderly members to sing and pray for them, writing cards and letters to elderly members or shut-ins, preparing meals to take to the homes of the elderly or shut-ins, or passing out meeting announcements in the community, etc. It is most important to teach the young people in the church the real joys of servant-hood.
- **New Christian's Class.** As the Lord adds new Christians to the local body, it's essential they be properly grounded in the faith. While this is often done as a special Bible class at the church building, perhaps a more effective means of nurturing these new Christians would be in the homes of various members. This informal setting provides a more relaxed atmosphere, and encourages a closer, more personal, union between new Christians and those who are more mature in the faith. This type of class needs to stress putting off the old man and putting on the new, personal growth and development through individual Bible study and prayer, and learning to find their place in the body of Christ as a laborer in the vineyard of the Lord. A great place for this kind of class is in the homes of the elders of the local congregation, where new Christians can become intimately acquainted with those who have been entrusted with their spiritual welfare.

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# A New Testament Pattern for Evangelism

**INTRODUCTION:** The book of Acts provides us with many wonderful examples that, when taken together, reveal a clear, concise pattern for church growth during the first century. These examples point to specific methods employed by first century Christians that resulted in the church spreading throughout the Roman world within the lifetime of some of its earliest converts. When conscientiously applied today, these same methods will result in the same kind of growth experienced nearly two thousand years ago.

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How many times have we heard someone say, “we can’t expect for the church to grow in this community because the Baptist church is too strong,” or “practically everyone in this part of town is Catholic?” But the book of Acts reveals that the New Testament church was first planted in the very heart of Judaism – the city of Jerusalem. No city on the face of the earth would have been more antagonistic toward the message of a resurrected Jesus than Jerusalem. After all, it was the city where Jesus had been crucified. While the city had witnessed many of the miracles of Jesus, and heard of His wonderful works performed elsewhere, Jesus had been a major disappointment to the people living there because He failed to fulfill their misplaced expectations about who and what the Messiah was supposed to be. And although the city had heard about His resurrection, they also heard that the disciples had stolen the body in a vain effort to prove His deity. But no one can deny that in the matter of perhaps one or two hours, three thousand men abruptly changed from disbelievers to believers in the deity of Jesus Christ, and in His resurrection from the dead.

While we can credit the success of Peter and the other apostles on Pentecost to the miraculous manifestation of the Holy Spirit, and the overwhelming evidence Peter presented showing that Jesus was resurrected from the dead, there was one other essential factor we often overlook that played a key part in their success. The audience that day consisted of “devout men!” Peter and the other apostles began by preaching the gospel of Christ to those who were already religiously devout. These men already had a deep love for God and for the things of God. They already knew the Scriptures, and they were already faithful members of “another religious organization.”

But when these devout Jews heard the convincing evidence that Jesus Christ was the Son of God, they were cut to the heart and wanted to know what they needed to do to be saved (Acts 2:37). Three thousand of them responded immediately and were baptized into Christ

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that same day (Acts 2:41). And it didn't stop there. The Lord continued to add to the church on a daily basis from among these same devout men and women (Acts 2:47).

## Teaching the Devout

Unfortunately, we often feel it's a wasted effort attempting to convert those already devoted to a particular religious belief. They're satisfied where they are, and aren't interested in changing. And besides, we would have to spend a lot of time deprogramming them from all the religious error they've learned. Therefore, we will have greater success reaching those who are not a member of any church.

Nonsense!

Take a closer look at those to whom the gospel of Christ was preached in the book of Acts. Notice that in each instance listed below, the gospel was preached to those who were already devout, religious, and in some cases, genuine religious fanatics.

Here are just a few examples:

- The devout Jews who were gathered together in the Temple at the ninth hour to pray (Acts 3).
- The Sanhedrin – the Supreme Court of the Jews (Acts 4, 5, and 7).
- The religious Samaritans (Acts 8).
- The devout Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8).
- The fanatically zealous Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9).
- The devout Gentile, Cornelius (Acts 10).
- The religious Jews who were worshipping in their own synagogues (Acts 13, 14, 17).
- The devout women by the riverside (Acts 16).
- The religiously devout pagans who worshipped false gods (Acts 17, 18, and 19).

Those who are religious or devoted to a particular denominational belief already have some things in common with you and me. Except for certain groups like the Mormons, the Adventists, or the Jehovah's Witnesses, we generally share a common belief in God and in the deity of Christ with the rest of the religious world. We both believe the Bible to be the divinely inspired Word of God. We both believe Jesus built His church, and that we need to

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be a member of the body of Christ. We both believe that Jesus is coming again to judge the world, and we both believe some will be saved and go to heaven, and others will be eternally lost.

## Approaching the Devout

In fact, what we believe in common may even outweigh what we do not share in common. Here are a couple of suggested approaches to those who are already members of a particular religious denomination:

- “Since we believe Jesus is the Son of God, and that the Bible is the Word of God, and since we believe Jesus is going to judge us on the basis of His Word (John 12:48), don’t you agree that it would be good for us to study His Word together to see what Jesus wants us to do, and how He wants us to live?”
- “Jesus said, ‘if you love me, keep My commandments’ (John 14:15). I want to make certain I’m keeping His commandments, and I’m sure you do too, because I know we both love the Lord. How about the two of us studying the Word of God together? Don’t you agree the Lord would be pleased seeing us doing that?”

Today, the church of the Lord is filled with those who were converted out of various religious denominations. In fact, much of the success of gospel preachers during the restoration movement of the mid-1800’s and the same success enjoyed by gospel preachers in the 1930’s, 40’s and 50’s, was due to the fact that they preached to religious people in the denominational world. What worked for the Lord’s disciples in the first century will work for us today. Don’t overlook the wonderful opportunities to take the truth of the gospel to those who believe they already have it.

## They Preached Jesus

Today we hear a lot about preaching the man rather than the plan. But the apostolic examples found in the book of Acts reveals that they preached the man in the plan. It is impossible to preach Jesus apart from preaching how He fulfilled the plan of God. We need to show how Jesus provided salvation through the sacrifice of His own blood, as well as show how we are translated into the spiritual kingdom, the church.

The sermon by Peter and the other apostles on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:22-47) served as a basis for all other sermons recorded in the book of Acts. What follows is a brief synopsis of Peter’s sermon, plus a synopsis of the events following the sermon that tell us about the work and worship of the church.

- Jesus was a man approved of God by miracles, wonders and signs done in their midst (v. 22). Jesus had the credentials of a God-sent teacher, for no man could do the things He did unless God was with Him (cf. John 3:1-2).

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- He was crucified according to the foreknowledge and foreordination of God, in keeping with God's eternal purpose (v. 23). Jesus died in keeping with Old Testament prophecies that foretold of His suffering and death (cf. Isaiah 53; Psalms 22).
  - Jesus was resurrected from the dead and ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God (vs. 24-35). The prophet David spoke of the resurrection of Christ (Psalm 16:8-11). The ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven was a promise God gave to David (2 Samuel 7:11-17). The ascension of Jesus Christ to sit on David's throne in heaven was prophesied in the Old Testament (Psalm 2; Psalm 110; Zechariah 6:12-13; 9:9-10; Isaiah 9:6-7; cf. 2 Samuel 7:11-17). Therefore, Jesus Christ is now reigning as King over His spiritual kingdom (not an earthly kingdom of this world – cf. John 18:36-37), and Jesus is now sitting and reigning on the throne of David in heaven (which means His throne will not be on the earth in some supposed future millennial reign).
  - Salvation from sins to all who believe is achieved through repentance and by being baptized (immersed) in the name of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:38-39). Baptism in the name of Jesus Christ is “for (in order to receive) the remission of sins” (Acts 2:38). Jesus also used the phrase, “for the remission of sins,” when He spoke of His blood being shed for many so that they might have the remission of their sins (Matthew 26:28). The people on Pentecost were not being baptized because they had already received the remission of sins any more than Jesus shed His blood for people who had already received the remission of their sins. There can be no forgiveness of sins without the shedding of blood (cf. Hebrews 9:22).
  - Salvation from our sins is dependent upon our doing something – we take an active role in our own salvation by obedience to the commandments of God (Acts 2:40). God in His grace and mercy has extended salvation to “as many as the Lord our God shall call” – which includes the Jewish and Gentile nations from Pentecost forward until this day (Acts 2:39b). However, we must “be saved” (save ourselves) from this perverse generation by accepting God's gracious gift of salvation, and by repenting and being baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38-40).
  - Those who are saved are also added to the church (Acts 2:41, 47). The church is comprised of those who have been saved by believing, repenting and being baptized into Christ for the remission of sins. We do not join the church on our own accord, but are added to the church by the Lord when we have complied with the requirements of salvation.
  - Those who are believers in Christ and who have been added to the church are known for certain attributes (Acts 2:42-47). They engaged in regular and systematic worship by continuing steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine (teaching), in fellowship (common

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association and joint participation in the Lord's work), in breaking of bread (the observance of the Lord's Supper in memory of His death), and in prayers (communing with God) (Acts 2:42). They lovingly responded to the material needs of each other (Acts 2:44-45). And as followers of Christ, their daily devotion and praise to God won them the respect of all the people (Acts 2:46-47).

Every sermon that followed Pentecost contains some of the same elements found in Acts chapter two.

- Peter and John to the crowd in Solomon's Porch (Acts 3:12-26).
- Peter and John before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:8-20).
- Twelve apostles before the Sanhedrin (Acts 5:27-42).
- Steven before the Sanhedrin (Acts 7).
- Philip to the people of Samaria (Acts 8:4-12).
- Philip to the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-39).
- Ananias to Saul of Tarsus (Acts 9:10-19).
- Peter to Cornelius (Acts 10:24-48).
- Paul and Barnabas in Antioch in Pisidia (Acts 13:14-52).
- Paul and Silas to the Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:30-33).
- Paul to the Athenians (Acts 17:22-32).
- Paul to the mob in Jerusalem (Acts 22:1-21).
- Paul before Felix (Acts 24:10-25).
- Paul before Agrippa (Acts 26:1-32).
- Paul to the Jewish leaders in Rome (Acts 28:17-31).

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## The Church in the Plan of God

It is impossible to preach the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ without also preaching the kingdom of God (the church and its place in the plan of God). These are inseparable and were the foundation upon which all the sermons by Peter and the other apostles were built. This was also the foundation for sermons by other first century Christians, and by Paul who was chosen as a special apostle to the Gentiles.

The preaching of Jesus Christ and the kingdom (the church) are repeatedly linked together in the book of Acts.

- **Philip's preaching to the people in Antioch:** "But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized" (Acts 8:12)
- **Paul's preaching to the people in Ephesus:** "And he went into the synagogue and spoke boldly for three months, reasoning and persuading concerning the things of the kingdom of God... And this continued for two years, so that all who dwelt in Asia heard the Word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks" (Acts 19:8-10).
- **Paul's comments to the Ephesian elders in Troas:** "...I kept back nothing that was helpful, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you publicly and from house to house, testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ... And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, will see my face no more. Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men, for I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:20-27).
- **Paul's preaching to the Jewish leaders in Rome:** "So when they had appointed him a day, many came to him at his lodging, to whom he explained and solemnly testified of the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus from both the Law of Moses and the Prophets, from morning till evening" (Acts 28:23).
- **Paul's preaching while in Rome:** "Then Paul dwelt two whole years in his own rented house, and received all who came to him, preaching the kingdom of God and teaching the things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ with all confidence, no one forbidding him" (Acts 28:31).

Therefore, to preach Jesus Christ is to also preach about the plan of salvation, and the Lord's church (the kingdom).

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## They Devoted Themselves to Prayer

The apostles and first century Christians were devoted to making prayer a key ingredient in their lives, and one they relied heavily upon since they knew they could not succeed in doing the Lord's work without His intervention and help.

- **They continued “steadfast in prayers” (Acts 2:42).** It would be safe to assume these prayers were both personal and intercessory – that is, prayers offered as an expression of one's own personal needs and heartfelt thanks, and prayers offered on behalf of others who needed to hear the message of the gospel. These saints understood for prayers to be answered, they would have to be living in keeping with God's will. The psalmist verified this fact when he wrote, “If I regard iniquity in my heart (if I had cherished or loved sin in my heart), the Lord will not hear” (Psalm 66:18).
- **They prayed for moral courage to speak the Word “with all boldness” (Acts 4:23-31).** Since Jesus Himself had been rejected and crucified, the disciples of the first century fully understood the obstacles they needed to overcome in preaching the gospel of Christ. It would not be easy; and for some, their fear of what could happen to them would become an almost impossible barrier.

How did they overcome that fear? They prayed for boldness and confidence to proclaim the message of Christ. And God answered that prayer – “they spoke the Word of God with boldness” (Acts 4:31b). People who appear to have no fear in speaking to others about the gospel of Christ are not some kind of Super-Saint! They are just like the rest of us. The only thing that makes them different is that they devote themselves to prayer – constantly praying for the courage and boldness they need to approach others about Christ. If you have fear talking to someone about Jesus Christ, pray and expect God to honor that prayer. He will.

We can also pray for the Lord to open doors of opportunity to us, and for guidance to say the right things. When the apostle Paul came to Corinth, a city filled with wickedness and idolatry, the Lord said, “I have many people in this city” (Acts 18:10). Even before Paul began preaching, the Lord told him there were people in the city of Corinth who were both ready and willing to respond to his message. The Lord had already opened the door of opportunity to Paul. All he needed to do was preach Jesus, and the Lord would bring him together with those who were searching for the truth.

Likewise, the Lord has many people in this city – our city! Therefore, we need to pray that the Lord open doors of opportunity, and connect us with those who are truly seeking to do His will.

Jesus promised His apostles, “...when they deliver you up, do not worry about how or what you should speak. For it will be given to you in that hour what you should speak; for it

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is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father who speaks in you” (Matthew 10:19-20; cf. Luke 12:11-12). This was a special promise given just to the twelve apostles, assuring them that they would be able to speak by divine inspiration through the direct guidance of the Holy Spirit. But we also need to know how and what we should speak to those with whom we talk. Therefore, we need to first prepare ourselves with an adequate knowledge of the Spirit given Word of God through diligent study, and then practice teaching it to others. But after we’ve done our part in properly preparing ourselves to teach, we need to pray for guidance when speaking to the lost – asking the Lord to help us know how and what we should speak.

We can pray that those we study with may have wisdom and understanding, and that their hearts be open and receptive to the Word. The apostle Paul prayed this prayer on behalf of the Ephesian Christians. He wrote, “Therefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus and your love for all the saints, do not cease to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers: that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints” (Ephesians 1:15-18). We can also pray on behalf of those with whom we study, praying they, “may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding” (Colossians 1:9).

## **They Tailored Their Message**

The apostles and first century Christians tailored their message to meet the needs of the hearer. They started at the point of faith of their audience and preached unto them Jesus. All too often, we want to conduct every Bible study the same way – covering the same information, no matter who we happen to be studying with.

Generally, we start by tracing the history of the Patriarchs from Adam to the time of Moses and the giving of the Law at Mount Sinai. Then we proceed to talk about the events from Moses to the time of Christ, covering the death, burial and resurrection of Christ. Then we move on to describe the events starting at Pentecost in Acts, trace the growth and development of the church, and eventually focus on the message of salvation.

By the time we’ve gotten to the subject of salvation, we’ve taken our audience through two or three lessons of Old Testament and New Testament history. We feel this is necessary to avoid misunderstandings about the Old Testament Law of Moses verses the New Testament Law of Christ, and to thoroughly ground them in knowing who Jesus was and what He came to do.

While all of this information is important, most of it is certainly not essential in leading someone to Christ. Furthermore, virtually all of this can be covered in one simple hour-long lesson – a lesson that traces an overview of the Bible from creation to the life and times of Jesus. The essentials everyone needs to understand is basically summarized by the apostle

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Paul, namely that “Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose from the dead the third day according to the Scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). Once we have established that fact, then we can proceed to help them understand that to receive the remission of sins they must “repent and be baptized... in the name of Jesus Christ” (Acts 2:38), and when they have done that, the Lord will add them to the church (Acts 2:47).

## Examples of Tailoring the Message

There are several wonderful examples of how inspired teachers began at the point of faith of their students, and then tailored the message to fit their individual need. Here are only three:

- **The sermon on Pentecost (Acts 2:22-40).** Peter was speaking to devout Jews who needed to be convinced that Jesus of Nazareth had been resurrected from the dead and had ascended to sit on David’s throne at the right hand of God in heaven.
- **Philip’s teaching of the Ethiopian Eunuch (Acts 8:26-39).** Philip studied with a man who was unfamiliar with Old Testament prophecy, and needed to understand that the prophet Isaiah was speaking of the coming Messiah – Jesus of Nazareth. Therefore, when the eunuch asked concerning the prophecy of Isaiah (Isaiah 53:7-8), “Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him” (Acts 8:35).
- **Aquila and Priscilla’s teaching of Apollos (Acts 18:24-28).** Apollos “had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John.” Therefore, he needed someone to explain to him “the way of God more accurately” – like the disciples who were in a similar situation in Acts 19:1-5.

## God Gave the Increase

First century Christians planted and watered, but relied on God to give the increase (1 Corinthians 3:5-8). They understood their responsibility was to simply sow the seed and, when possible, give that seed the additional nourishment it needed to grow. But in the end, it would be up to God to give the increase – the yield. First century Christians did the teaching, but God did the converting.

The same is true for us today. Our job is to simply teach the Word, and when possible, nourish that Word. But God does the converting through the Word. Understanding this helps us avoid two major traps:

- **It keeps us from thinking too highly of ourselves:** Everyone seems impressed with numbers, especially by the number of people someone may have converted.

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However, the apostle Paul told the Corinthians, “neither he who plants is anything, nor he who waters, but God who gives the increase” (1 Corinthians 3:7).

We are simply “God’s fellow workers,” but the field belongs to God (1 Corinthians 3:9). Therefore, the glory belongs exclusively to God and not to us. If we build on the foundation of Jesus Christ, and our work endures, then we will receive a reward. Conversely, if our “work is burned,” we will suffer the sadness of that loss, but we will still be rewarded for what we have attempted to do (cf. 1 Corinthians 3:14-15).

Regardless of the outcome of our sowing and watering, or of our building on the foundation of Jesus Christ – GOD GETS THE GLORY IN ALL THINGS! NOT US!

- **It keeps us from becoming “soil inspectors:”** When we sow the seed of the Word of God, that seed will fall upon one of four kinds of hearts – just like the seed that was sown in the parable of Jesus (Matthew 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20; Luke 8:4-15). The Word will fall on:
  - Those whose minds are closed to the truth.
  - Those who lack depth of conviction.
  - Those who receive the truth with joy, but later become distracted by the things of this world.
  - Those who, after receiving it, will yield a productive response.

Our job is not to go around as a “soil inspector,” selectively sowing seed where we think it will do the most good. Our job is to simply sow the seed and accept the fact that some of our efforts will not yield the results we had hoped for.

Remember the words of the writer of Ecclesiastes: “He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who makes everything. In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good” (Ecclesiastes 11:4-6).

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# Following the Example of Jesus in Teaching

**INTRODUCTION:** Without question, Jesus was the greatest teacher who ever lived. His methods of communicating God’s Word to the lost were unique and effective. And when He finished speaking to the crowds, they were not only impressed by the fact that Jesus spoke to them as “one having authority and not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:29), they were drawn even closer to Him because of His sincerity and simplicity. When we take a closer look at the example of Jesus in teaching the lost, we can see a definite pattern that we can imitate in our efforts to do the same.

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As a master teacher, Jesus was uniquely different in the methods He employed. Although He was the Son of God, He was not a “professional” teacher. He had never been trained in the rabbinical schools of the Scribes and Pharisees, or the Sadducees. But the lessons He taught reached to the very depths of the soul, and changed the lives of men and women forever. His lessons simply were unforgettable.

There is a common mistake made by many when it comes to teaching the lost. They believe only “professionals” are capable of doing this work. By “professionals,” they mean those who have either been through a school of preaching, or who have a degree from some Bible college, and have been professionally trained to preach and teach. Even Jesus encountered this same kind of misguided prejudice when He came face to face with the “professional” teachers of His day. When they heard about the impact Jesus was having, they asked, “How does this Man know letters, having never studied?” (John 7:15). The reply Jesus gave not only silenced His critics, but provides us with an answer to those who would question our credentials. “Jesus answered them and said, ‘My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me.’” (John 7:16). Jesus told His critics He was qualified to teach because His doctrine was not His, but God’s. The same thing qualifies us to teach. If we’re intimately familiar with God’s Word, and we’re teaching God’s truths, then we’re qualified to teach.

## The Methods Jesus Used

The methods Jesus employed in teaching were uniquely different from the methods most commonly used by the so-called “professionals” of His day. The uniqueness of His teaching methods is seen in the following examples:

- Although Jesus taught those who came to Him, He also went out into the world and sought opportunities to teach others. Jesus made it clear to His critics that, “the Son

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of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:10). He portrayed God the Father as a seeking God – like the shepherd who left the 99 sheep and went into the wilderness seeking the one sheep that was lost, or the woman who swept her house to find the one coin that was lost (Luke 15:4-10). Jesus didn’t send His disciples out so that they could bring the people to Him. Instead, He went seeking them. He looked for every opportunity to personally share the Word of God with others.

In the same manner, we need to be seeking the lost. That means going to them rather than waiting for them to come to us. It means taking advantage of every opportunity to ask someone we meet for a opportunity to study the Word of God with them, or to speak with them about their relationship with the Lord. Just as Jesus came “to seek and to save that which is lost,” we must also do the same.

- While Jesus occasionally preached to massive crowds, He also taught on a more intimate basis. Not everyone was converted. In fact Jesus converted only a few. Following His resurrection from the dead, His disciples only numbered 120 (Acts 1:15). Among that number were the few with whom Jesus had spent most of His time – the apostles. Jesus knew the benefits of thoroughly indoctrinate a select few, who would each likewise teach a select few, who would also teach a few. The result would be Christianity growing geometrically rather than simply arithmetically.

Of all those who followed Jesus, the apostles were the most willing to learn. As a result, they were the ones Jesus worked with more closely than others. It’s easy to concentrate all our efforts on someone who is not receptive to the gospel, and overlook others who are perhaps more willing to learn. It’s also easy to spread ourselves too thin, and work with too many people at a time. Concentrating on a few and working intently with them is not only Biblical, it’s often more practical, and certainly more effective. This is not saying we should neglect those who show signs of resistance, for even some of the most stubborn hearts have occasionally been won to Christ. But, if we have to choose between the two, concentrating on those who are more receptive to the Word would be a more efficient way of budgeting our limited time.

- Jesus never considered anyone unworthy of His time. He made Himself available to everyone who would sincerely listen to Him – from Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews who came to Him at night (John 3:1-21), to the lowliest of sinners and publicans with whom He ate (Luke 15:1-2). If they were interested in hearing what He had to say, Jesus would give them His time and attention.

In the same manner, we should be willing to teach anyone who is willing to listen, regardless of their status. While we might like to see a church filled with rich, influential men like Nicodemus, never forget that the rich and influential are not always receptive to the gospel (1 Corinthians 1:26-29). We may draw criticism from

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some who would rather not have their congregation filled with those whom society considers “the dregs.” But to the Lord, these are precious souls who need to be saved from the torments of hell. Remember that even the church at Corinth was made up of some former “dregs.” Paul wrote, “Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God” (1 Corinthians 6:9-11).

- Jesus was approachable, compassionate and friendly, and became a genuine friend to those He taught. He was never overbearing or rude. Jesus touched the hearts of men and women by His genuine compassion, and by being approachable to even the lowest sinner. He gave them the time they needed – especially those who comprised His inner-circle of friends. They were not simply numbers to Jesus, they were real people with real souls and real needs. And even though He was stern and demanding, Jesus never displayed an offensive, overbearing or superior attitude toward anyone – not even to His most ardent enemies. He never appeared haughty. He was never impatient or tactless, and never acted discourteous. Rather, He was gentle, sincere, humble and longsuffering.

Some of the most telling words about how Jesus was perceived by the common people are found in the opening remarks of Luke chapter 15. Luke writes, “Then all the tax collectors and the sinners drew near to Him to hear Him” (Luke 15:1). The despised tax collectors and sinners “drew near” to Jesus because He was friendly and approachable. People were literally drawn to Him because they found a genuine friend in Jesus – someone who accepted them as they were, but who also gently showed them what they needed to be. Jesus was repeatedly called the “friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34), not because He approved their sin or ignored it, but because He dared to show genuine love and compassion to those whom the rest of society considered as outcasts.

The effectiveness of our teaching will be enhanced by the measure of our kindness, compassion, love and friendship toward those we teach. A genuine, heartfelt interest in the lost will carry through in our teaching, and being their friend will often open even the most callused of hearts. Humility is one of the most difficult attributes for some to develop, but it is essential to anyone who would teach the lost. And when it comes to restoring the erring, gentleness is absolutely critical. The apostle Paul told the Galatians, “Brethren, if a man is overtaken in any trespass, you who are spiritual restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness, considering yourself lest you also be tempted” (Galatians 6:1). Gentleness, meekness and humility are the hallmarks of an effective teacher. Like Jesus, we need to be friendly and approachable, and above all, a genuine “friend of sinners.”

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- Jesus used every occasion and opportunity to teach others. He never passed up an opportunity to teach a lesson to those who needed to hear one. The lessons were simple, but profound. They used examples taken from everyday life, and were spoken to people in every imaginable setting. He taught about a fig tree while passing by on the road (Matthew 21:18-22). He taught His disciples in the grain fields (Matthew 12:1-8), and He taught while getting a drink from a well (John 4:6-26). From the Temple to a house, from a grain field to a well, Jesus used every occasion to teach those who would listen to Him speak about the wonderful Word of Life.

Sitting around a kitchen table with Bibles spread open is not the only way to teach a Bible class. It may be that the only opportunity we have to share the message of the gospel with another is in one brief moment of time, and may be in settings ranging from a street corner to a coffee shop. If there is an opportunity for a more controlled setting where greater time can be given to studying the Word of God, then schedule the Bible study for that time. But if this one passing moment is all we have to tell someone about Jesus, don't let the opportunity pass by.

- Jesus varied His lessons with the circumstances. His lessons were tailored to fit the needs of His listeners. Although most lessons centered around a central theme of the “abundant life” and how to achieve it, Jesus custom designed His lessons to meet the specific needs of His listeners. He began where they were and spoke to their greatest need. This was not only a method employed by Jesus, but also by the disciples of Christ who did the same thing during the early days of the New Testament church. Knowing the needs of His hearers, and then tailoring an appropriate message, was one thing that made Jesus so effective.

We need to be flexible as well. There is a wide range of excellent materials that can be effectively used in teaching the lost. These resources employ a wide range of methods as well – some are more effective than others. To know which is the best to use, we need to know the specific needs of those to whom we are talking. Not every Bible class needs to begin with the same material or use the same approach. Flexibility to tailor our lessons to meet the specific needs of those we teach and the wisdom to know the best way to approach them is essential to our ultimate success.

- Jesus never forced anyone beyond the limits of their own abilities. While Jesus challenged people to rise above their self-imposed limitations, He also realized that forcing someone beyond their abilities was counter-productive. And even though Jesus showed confidence in His follower's abilities to reach a required standard, He understood their limitations and never proceeded with new lessons until they were ready for them. He patiently worked with them at their own level of understanding until they were ready for something more advanced. To His chosen disciples, Jesus said, “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now.” (John 16:12). The time for greater understanding would come later.

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Patience is paramount in teaching and exhortation. To be certain, there will be limitations with those whom we teach. The level of understanding for some will be greater and will allow for more advanced teaching. But for others, even grasping the basic principles of the doctrine of Christ will be all they can handle at first. The wise teacher will recognize those limitations and not seek to push the learner to a point where they become frustrated and discouraged. Knowing how far we can go with any given prospect is essential to our success. There is only so much a person can absorb and retain, and we need to be keenly aware of those limitations. Repetition or review will probably be needed more for some than for others.

- Jesus always appealed to the Scriptures. When answering objections, and when confronting His critics, Jesus repeatedly appealed to the Scriptures. He also took special pains to impress upon His disciples the meaning of certain passages, and always used the Scriptures in His conversations with them. His lessons were Biblically based. In all, there are at least 66 references to the Old Testament Scriptures in His dialogues with the disciples, and more than 90 allusions to the Old Testament when He spoke to others.

Nothing silences an objection more quickly than turning to the Scriptures and allowing the Word of God to speak for itself. We may be able to paraphrase certain passages, but unless we can either quote them from memory or point to them in the pages of our Bibles, we will never be as effective as we could be. When we point out a particular passage of Scripture and someone says, “Well, that’s your interpretation,” use a technique employed by Jesus. Ask them to explain the meaning of the passage. Sincerely and humbly say something like, “Let’s reverse the role here, and allow me be the student and you be the teacher – and explain to me what you believe the passage is saying.”

## **The Methods We Often Use**

Unfortunately, the methods most commonly used in personally teaching others the gospel of Christ often fail to bring the desired results. The reason is basically two-fold.

- First, we often employ methods that prompt little or no dialogue between the teacher and the student, or between the exhorter and the one being exhorted. We simply “preach” to those with whom we are studying, and allow for little or no open dialogue between the teacher and the one being taught. As we will see, this type of method will almost always achieve some results. But the overall results leave a lot to be desired.

This method does little to promote a genuine one-to-one relationship between the teacher and the one being taught. Instead, it tends to foster feelings of superiority on the part of the teacher, since he is the one imparting the information, and relegates the learner to an inferior position. It is a highly structured method, and leaves little

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room for flexibility in responding to the specific needs of the learner. There is no spontaneity, and little or no opportunity for variety.

- Second, we sometimes use methods that may be coercive and manipulative in nature because we become more interested in the results achieved than we are in the persons being taught. It is easy to lose sight of the fact that our primary objective is saving souls and leading the lost and erring to Christ – not in seeing the attendance records increase. Sadly, those who are more concerned about numerical growth will often resort to methods of teaching that are manipulative in nature.

This particular method of teaching, while achieving results that are initially impressive, often falls very short in the end. It does little to foster genuine approachability, compassion or real friendship between the teacher and those being taught. Eventually, people come away from this experience feeling they were just a statistic – a number on someone’s church roll, rather than someone’s friend. And worst of all, this method often promotes an offensive, overbearing and superior attitude to emerge in the heart of the one using it. The teacher pushes the learner to accept truths and to respond before a genuine conviction of heart has taken place. The dropout rate of those “converted” under this method of teaching is enormous.

In his book, “Why Churches Grow,” Dr. Flavil R. Yeakley Jr. speaks about the two most commonly used approaches in attempting to reach the lost, and then compares their results with the method most frequently used by Jesus Himself. (Dr. Yeakley is the director of the Church Growth Institute at Abilene Christian University, and is a member of the North American Society for Church Growth, the Association of Statisticians of American Religious Bodies, the Religious Speech Communication Association, and the Association for Psychological Type.) Here are the methods most commonly used, as compared to the one used by the Lord.

- **Information Transmission.** This method employs a simple didactic means of teaching, in which a teacher basically transmits a body of information to the student. It employs the simple transmission of facts from the teacher to the student. There is little or no interaction between the student and teacher, and little or no involvement by the teacher in the life of those being taught.

When this method is employed in the personal work process the teacher believes that if enough information or facts can be transmitted to the hearer, they will be motivated to respond accordingly. This method assumes, of course, that the hearer has properly understood the information, and is capable of processing that information and of making the proper application to their own life. Teaching methods that frequently employ information transmission are filmstrip series, and other mechanical means of teaching or exhorting others.

Dr. Yeakley conducted a survey of 240 persons who had been taught using this method and discovered some very interesting facts. Out of the 240 persons who had

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been taught employing this technique, 60 were eventually baptized, leaving 180 who never responded. But out of the 60 who were baptized, 25 of that number eventually left the church. The initial success rate was only 25 percent of those taught (60 persons baptized out of 240 persons taught). But the overall success rate eventually dropped to 14.58 percent when taking into account the number of those who eventually left the church.

- **Manipulative Monologue.** This method of teaching employs the high-pressure tactics commonly associated with salesmen. The teacher generally maintains a very tight control over the setting, doing most of the talking, and only stopping to ask leading questions that are very carefully worded so they evoke only a very specific response. The entire process is controlling, and manipulates the person being taught in a very specific direction.

Unfortunately, when this method is employed in the personal work process, there is a tendency to manipulate people to take action without a genuine change of heart taking place first. This method also has a tendency to convince people of the need to be baptized, or become a member of the Church of Christ, without truly converting them to the Lord. But the reason this method is so commonly used is because it has such a high success rate of seeing people baptized.

However, when Dr. Yeakley conducted a survey of those who had been taught using this method, he found some very startling results. Of the 282 people who were taught using this method, 245 were baptized, leaving only 37 who never responded. That is an amazing success rate of nearly 87 percent. Unfortunately, the story doesn't end there. When this high-pressure, manipulative method of teaching is employed, there is a common phenomenon that follows – “buyers regret.” Yeakley discovered that of the 245 who were baptized, 209 eventually fell away. That brought the initial success rate of nearly 87 percent down to an overall success rate of only 12.76 percent – the lowest success rate of all.

**(The chart on the following page compares these two most commonly used methods of teaching the lost.)**

- **Non-manipulative Dialogue.** The most effective method of teaching others is the same technique Jesus employed – non-manipulative dialogue. This method sees the one being taught, or the one needing exhortation, as a friend. It promotes a friend-to-friend discussion of things that are of mutual interest. There is open dialogue between both the teacher and the student, where both feel free to express views and where both listen to the other.

Those who employ this method of teaching and exhortation are not interested in numbers or results – they are genuinely interested in souls. They aren't simply

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interested in conveying a body of facts, nor are they attempting to coerce or manipulate the ones with whom they study into taking action without conviction. They want to truly become a “friend of sinners,” and “seek and save that which is lost.” Those who successfully use this means of teaching and exhorting also become intimately involved in the lives of those whom they teach, understanding their basic needs, as well as knowing obstacles that must be gently overcome in order to lead this one to Christ. There is a genuine love for the souls of men and women, and an overwhelming desire to see them go to heaven.

### **Comparing the Two Methods Most Commonly Used The Transmission Method and the Manipulative Monologue Method**

<b>Transmission Method</b>	<b>Manipulative Monologue Method</b>
<p>240 Number Taught 180 Non-Responses 60 Baptized 25 Eventually Fell Away 35 Remained Faithful</p>	<p>282 Number Taught 37 Non-Responses 245 Baptized 209 Eventually Fell Away 36 Remained Faithful</p>
<p>25% Initial Success Rate 14.85% Overall Success Rate</p>	<p>86.87% Initial Success Rate 12.76% Overall Success Rate</p>

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# Notes

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# Finding the Lost

**INTRODUCTION:** Before Jesus ascended into heaven to take His place by the right hand of God, He issued this final command to His disciples: “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20). Taking an active role in making disciples is something the Lord expected from all who would be His followers. This, of course, raises several questions. For example, is everyone expected to personally teach the lost? And, how do we find people to study with, and how do we approach them? In the following lesson, we will explore how to set up a class, how we should prepare ourselves, and what we should teach when attempting to reach the lost? Let’s take these questions one at a time.

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**H**ow would you answer the question, “Is everyone expected to personally teach the lost?” The most simple and direct answer to this question is, “Yes.” In time, everyone should be capable of sharing the gospel of Christ with another. However, if you feel you are not capable of being directly involved in the teaching process at this time, there is a lot you can do to help those who are able to teach the lost. Here are a few examples.

- **Invite them to worship services or to a special home Bible study.** Dr. Flavil R. Yeakley conducted a survey through The Institute for American Church Growth, and asked over 10,000 people this question: “What was responsible for your coming to Christ and to this church?” Here are their replies:
  - I attended a gospel meeting (0.5%)
  - I visited there (1%)
  - I just walked in (3%)
  - I had a special need (3%)
  - I liked the programs (3%)
  - I liked the Bible classes (5%)
  - I liked the minister (6%)
  - I was invited by a friend or relative (79%)

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This survey revealed some very important, and somewhat disturbing, facts about how the lost are reached today. It appears to confirm our suspicions that gospel meetings, as traditionally held, may not be as effective in reaching the lost as they once were. Furthermore, few visitors, if any, are likely to simply walk in off the street on their own initiative and attend worship services unless there is a pressing need in their life – and of those who do, fewer still (around 3%) will obey the gospel.

This survey also has some bad news for most preachers. Only 5 to 6 percent of those who attended Bible classes or heard the preaching were impressed enough with what they heard to want to obey the gospel. But 79 percent of the more than 10,000 people surveyed said they obeyed the gospel because someone showed enough interest in them to personally invite them to attend worship services.

Never underestimate the value of inviting someone to attend worship services. This gives them an opportunity to have a first-hand look at the body of Christ – to be greeted by the members, to hear a Bible class and sermon (pray that they are both presented by someone who has properly prepared himself to teach), and to see and experience the worship of the Lord’s people (pray that it’s done “in spirit” as well as “in truth”).

- **Bring them to someone who can teach them.** In the book of John, there are two wonderful examples of where certain persons were brought to Christ.
  - **Nathanael:** Philip brought his brother, Nathanael to Jesus (John 1:43-51). When Jesus asked Philip to be His follower, Philip responded immediately. He was convinced that Jesus was the Messiah and wanted to share this news with his brother Nathanael. John tells us that “Philip found Nathanael and said to him, ‘We have found Him of whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote; Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph’” (John 1:45). When Nathanael expressed doubt, Philip simply replied, “Come and see” (John 1:46). Philip brought his brother to Jesus, but it was Jesus who convinced Nathanael that He was the Messiah.
  - **The townspeople of Sychar:** The woman at the well brought her neighbors, the townspeople of Sychar, to Jesus (John 4:5-30). When the woman at the well encountered Jesus, she immediately realized she was in the presence of someone uniquely different – at the very least, “a prophet” (John 4:19). But when Jesus told her He was the Messiah, she immediately went back into the nearby city of Sychar and told the people to “Come, see a Man who told me all things that I ever did. Could this be the Christ?” (John 4:29). The woman at the well didn’t teach the townspeople, but she brought them to Jesus. The next verse says, “Then they went out of the city and came to Him” (John 4:30).

If you are not able at this point in your growth and development as a Christian to comfortably share the gospel of Christ with others, bring them to someone who is

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capable of teaching them. Two benefits will come from doing this. One, you will be placing your friend in the hands of a capable teacher, and two, you will be there to learn from the experience. You will be hearing and seeing the teaching process take place, and eventually be able to teach on your own. Both you and your friend will learn from the experience.

- **Go along as a co-teacher, or to assist in the teaching process.** Some teachers prefer to work alone in the teaching process, while others prefer to have a co-teacher work with them. Both methods are Scriptural. But unless the teacher is well-versed, it may be wise for him to ask someone to accompany him. Here are some things a co-teacher or assistant can do to help the teaching process.
  - **Provide moral support.** You may not be able to teach a class like the apostle Paul, but you can certainly provide the encouragement of a Barnabas. For some, just having another faithful Christian as a companion in a teaching situation is essential.
  - **Look up Scriptures.** When the teacher is attempting to answer certain questions that may arise, you can be searching for specific Scriptural references that may help. Be sure to use a good concordance – not the one in the back of your Bible.
  - **Eliminate distractions.** When studying with a family where small children are present, there will generally be countless interruptions that can virtually destroy the teaching process. You can be a tremendous asset to the process by simply entertaining the children in a separate room while the Bible study is underway. You may choose to have your own Bible study by reading Bible stories, or by taking along a Bible video specifically designed for young children. Older members (grandparents) are especially useful in this area.
- **Open your home to an evangelistic Bible study.** What's an evangelistic Bible study? It's simply a Bible study that is intended to evangelize or teach those who are lost, and is aimed specifically at those who are not Christians. The purpose of the evangelistic Bible study is not to convert unbelievers during the study, but to lead to a personal, one-to-one study at a later time.

The process for having an evangelistic Bible study is simple:

- Have between 4 to 6 members each invite a friend to come with them to a study in your home. Keep the total number of those attending down to a manageable size – probably no more than a dozen total.
- Be certain to have everyone greet everyone else, spending a few moments to allow those who have come to the study to feel comfortable.
- Sing a verse or two of a couple of uplifting songs.

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- Spend a few moments discussing the needs of several who need prayers, and be sure to ask all those attending if they have any special prayer requests for themselves or others. Then designate someone to specifically pray for those mentioned – by name, and according to their particular needs (have that person take notes, if necessary).
  - Have a short 15 to 20 minute Bible study on a subject that would be of general interest to everyone present. Remember, the purpose of an evangelistic Bible study is not to convert the guest at that time, but to lead to a personal, one-to-one Bible study at a later date. Therefore, keep the subject matter of the evangelistic Bible study edifying and uplifting. Then end with a prayer that focuses on the things just studied.
  - Finally, enjoy one another's company in a strictly social environment with only simple refreshments brought by a few members.

You may not feel confident at this point in your growth as a Christian to teach others, but by being constantly exposed to the personal work process, you will be amazed at how quickly you will learn. One of the reasons Jesus made certain His inner-circle of disciples was constantly with Him was so they could observe Him. Jesus taught by example, and His disciples learned lessons by watching the Master Teacher at work – lessons they would never be able to learn any other way.

Being present with those who are skilled at teaching others the gospel of Christ is the best way to learn. You can bring your friends to them and then sit in on the class as well, you can go along as an assistant, or you can open your home to Bible classes, such as an evangelistic Bible study. Each time you observe someone else teaching the lost, you will be one step closer to being able to do the same yourself someday.

## **How do we Find People and How do we Approach Them?**

The most simple way to answer the first part of this question is to say what Jesus said, “Lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest!” (John 4:35). Opportunities are everywhere for Bible studies. From the largest metropolitan city to the smallest rural community – people everywhere are searching for the joy and peace they know will only come from having a right relationship with the Lord.

Where are all these potential prospects? Consider the following.

- **Relatives of members.** Virtually every member of the church has a husband, wife, son, daughter, brother, sister or some other relative who is not a Christian. Some might have “grown up” in the church, but never obeyed the gospel. Others may be members of a particular religious denomination, while still others may not attend

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anywhere. If they can see a genuine and sincere dedication to the Lord in the lives of their relatives who are members of the Body of Christ, the battle is half-won.

- **Friends or neighbors of members.** As we said earlier, some may feel inadequate to personally teach their friends or neighbors, but are willing to invite them into their home so someone else can do the teaching. Several unbelievers have been converted to Christ in this manner, especially if they are impressed by the faithfulness and dedication of their friend or neighbor who is a Christian.
- **Casual, everyday acquaintances.** There are people we encounter practically every day of our lives in either a social or business setting. These are wonderful opportunities. The cashier at the bank, the grocery clerk, the waitress in our favorite restaurant, the gas station attendant, the medical receptionist, the doctor, the dentist – the list is practically endless.
- **New residents.** People moving into the neighborhood have often made a break from old ties of home, community and church. They are alone, and in need of someone to show interest in them. Some congregations have gone to the extent of putting together small packets of information about the church, getting a list of new utility hookups in the neighborhood or city, and forming a “Welcome Wagon” type group to contact these people personally.
- **Penal Institutions.** These may include city and county jails, work camps, or prisons. Sometimes prisoners are willing to study in a group to simply make an impression on a parole board. However, others sincerely want to change their lives. Remember, it’s not our job to be “soil inspectors.” Our job is to simply sow the seed, and let the Lord give whatever increase may follow.
- **Homes for seniors (Assisted Living Facilities).** Group Bible studies can be most effective in these situations, providing individual follow-up is done. The goal, therefore, should be to target specific individuals who show interest, and speak to them about having a private, individual Bible study.
- **Children of those who are Christians.** Parents are often troubled by the fact that their children, who are old enough and mature enough to obey the gospel, have shown little interest. This is a perfect opportunity to teach one-on-one, or to set up a class designed specifically to teach a group of young people together – much like an evangelistic Bible class. Of course, the best place for this type of class is in a home setting where the young people can feel free to talk more openly about their individual needs.
- **Those who inquire about the church through various means.** This would include those who visit worship services, those who simply call to inquire about the church, or those who enroll in a Bible Correspondence Course.

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- **Members who have drifted away and no longer attend.** Teaching the lost includes restoring those who have drifted away from the Lord for one reason or another. However, in our efforts to encourage those who have stopped attending, it is not unusual to discover they have family members who have not obeyed the gospel. Old directories are an excellent source for these names.
  - **Going from door to door.** When all else fails, try knocking on doors. Jehovah's Witnesses and the Mormons have been highly successful in using this method. Unfortunately, we're experts in coming up with all kinds of reasons for saying this method is ineffective. However, the real reason we don't go door to door is simply the fear of rejection or just plain laziness.

If all the above sources for finding Bible studies are fully explored, there will probably be more Bible classes with unbelievers than most congregations can adequately handle. But if we run out of people to study with, we can actually find prospects by going from door to door. This means we will be talking to total strangers, but even this method can achieve good results if we approach them correctly. Whatever we do, we don't want to mislead anyone. Our purpose is to get an opportunity to study God's Word with them and their family, not to conduct a survey, or take a church census.

To answer the second part of our question – “how do we approach them?” – the answer is to approach them honestly, humbly and sincerely. There is no room for deception in the work of the Lord – no room for a hidden agenda, or hidden motives. Be honest and above-board at all times.

Here are some suggested ways to approach someone for a Bible study.

- **Be confident.** When approaching someone for a Bible study for the first time we may be somewhat apprehensive. Most are afraid they will be turned down. They fear rejection. But rejections should never be taken personally. They are simply telling us they don't want to study the Bible at this time. However, circumstances might radically change in their life sometime in the future, making them much more interested at that time. So, never rule them out permanently. Be confident when approaching everyone, and remember that the reason we are seeking an opportunity to study is to lead them to Christ. Also, remember that we are doing what the Lord expects of us by asking them for a study, whether or not they accept at this time.
- **Be sold.** If what we have spiritually isn't important to us, then it will be difficult to convince others it should be important to them. We need to reflect the same joy early Christians had. Never forget the value and benefit of what we have as Christians, and the benefit it will be to those who accept it. The truth we share with others will give them a way to God (John 6:44-45), save their soul (Romans 1:16), and give them everything they need to be complete (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

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- **Be complimentary.** The apostle Paul was very successful in using this approach – especially with the Athenians. He commended them for being “very religious.” As Paul stood in the midst of the Aeropagus in Athens, his opening remarks were, “Men of Athens, I perceive that in all things you are very religious” (Acts 17:22). He then proceeded to take advantage of the situation by drawing their attention to the altar with a particular inscription. He said, “for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you” (Acts 17: 23). We need to find ways of commending those with whom we study without compromising our convictions, or without leaving them thinking we endorse their particular religious beliefs. We can commend their religious convictions, and for attempting to live by the Word of God.

Here are some suggestions for approaching those who are already a member of a particular religious denomination:

- “I understand you’re a member of the (denomination) church. Actually, we both have a lot in common. We both believe the Bible to be the Word of God, and that Jesus is the Son of God. But there are also some differences. Since Jesus wanted His disciples to all be one (united together in a common belief), wouldn’t you agree that it would be good for us to read our Bibles together and talk about these things? When would be a good time for you?”
- “I know we both believe the Bible to be the Word of God, and we both know Jesus is going to judge us by that Word. What bothers me is that we have some differences in how we understand some of Jesus’ teaching. I want to make certain I’m following the Lord’s commandments, and I know you do too, so when can we get together to talk about some of these things?”
- “Jesus said, ‘if you love me, keep my commandments’ (John 14:15). I know we both love the Lord, but we aren’t keeping His commandments the same, because we don’t see all of them the same way. That worries me, because Jesus also said, ‘you shall know the truth, and the truth shall set you free’ (John 8:32). I want to know if there’s something I’m missing. Can we talk about these things together?”

Here are some suggestions for approaching those who are not Christians, and are not a member of any religious denomination:

- “Have you ever read the Bible? I’ve been a Christian for several years, and I’ve discovered that the more I read the Word of God, the more I find answers to some of the most important questions in life – questions like, ‘where did we come from,’ and ‘what happens to us after we die.’ I would love to have an opportunity to sit down with you for just one hour and show you some things I’ve discovered. That’s

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all I ask – just one hour. And after that, if you want to study more, fine. If not, we’re still going to be friends. When would be a good time for us to get together?”

- “Have you ever thought much about what happens to us after we die? I sure have – most people do. The Bible gives us all those answers. It tells us what happens at the moment of death, and where we go after that. But most importantly, it tells us how to get ready for that day. I would like to show you what the Bible says about these things. All I ask is just one hour of your time – nothing more. Can you give me one hour? After our time together, if you want to study more, that will be okay too, but if not, we’ll still be friends. When would you have an hour for us to get together?”
- “I don’t know how you feel about it, but I believe the world would be a far better place if more people lived by the teachings of Jesus in the Bible. In fact, I’m trying to encourage more people to study the Word of God, especially as a family. I’ve got a simple lesson I know would be of interest to your whole family. It takes only one hour – that’s all I ask – and I would like to present it to you. Do you think we could get together for an hour to study the Bible together? When would be a good time for you?”

## Handling Objections

Sooner or later we will encounter some objections to having a Bible study. How do we handle those? Here are some simple guidelines for helping to avoid objections that may be raised to having a Bible study.

Some may want to decline our offer for a Bible study simply because they don’t want their beliefs challenged. We can generally avoid this kind of obstacle by simply asking for an opportunity to sit down with them and study God’s Word together, exchanging ideas, and coming to a better understanding of each other’s beliefs.

Others may feel uncomfortable having a Bible study because they don’t feel well-grounded in a knowledge of the Bible, and want to avoid any embarrassment. This obstacle can usually be overcome by stressing that our study together will be very basic, and will give them a general overview of the entire Bible. The study will also help answer a lot of basic questions about how the Bible came to us, and why it is so important.

Still others may not be ready for the changes they know will be expected of someone who becomes a Christian. Although it is unlikely anyone will actually say this, they may indicate it in other ways. If we sense this is the problem we can reassure them that we simply want to talk with them about the plan God has for every person, and that they will remain our friend whether or not they accept what we have to say.

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Finally, there will always be a few who will decline the offer for a Bible study because they are not interested in spiritual things. As we stated earlier, there is perhaps little we can do for them at the moment. But we can always leave the door open for a future study. There generally comes a time in the life of everyone when they want to know more about God. We can tell them that if that time comes, please let us know.

However, let's look at some specific objections that may arise, and consider some possible answers. Do not try to memorize these answers, but simply use them as a guide for forming your own answers. Always keep in mind that whatever the objection may be, your answer needs to be from the heart – very sincere and personal.

- **Objection:** “I’m not interested in changing churches.”  
**Reply:** “I realize there are a lot of churches in the world today. Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could all be united? After all, that’s what Jesus wanted, isn’t it? (The answer will usually be ‘Yes.’) The only way I know to make that happen is if we do as Paul said in 1st Corinthians chapter one, and ‘all speak the same things.’ And the only way I know to ‘speak the same things’ is if we study together from the same book, the Bible. This is all I’m asking – for the two of us to study together so that we can better understand each other, and the Word of God. When can we get together?”
- **Objection:** “I’m already a member of a church.”  
**Reply:** “Which church is that? (Wait for the answer.) I’m sure you’ll agree that the religious world is certainly divided. But wouldn’t it be wonderful if everyone were united together. This is what Jesus prayed for in John chapter seventeen. He wanted His disciples to ‘all be one’ as He and the Father were one. This is why I’m asking for an opportunity to study the Bible with you – so that we can better understand each other, and the Word of God. When can we get together?”
- **Objection:** “Aren’t you the group that believes you’re the only ones going to heaven?”  
**Reply:** “I’m sure you know that the Bible speaks quite a lot about the Lord’s church. And I’m also sure you know that the world is filled with churches that are NOT the Lord’s church, but were started by some man or some group of men. I believe the Bible teaches that we need to be a member of the Lord’s church to go to heaven. Don’t you agree? (The answer will usually be ‘Yes.’) Well, if I’m not a member of the Lord’s church, then I want to know how to find it. That’s why I would like to study the Bible with you. Perhaps we can examine some of these things together. When would be a good time for us to study together?”
- **Objection:** “I don’t go to church, and I don’t know anything about the Bible.”  
**Reply:** “That’s okay. The Bible study I’m offering will give you an opportunity to learn quite a lot about the Bible. It will give you a general overview of the Bible, and help answer some of the most basic questions in life. You’ll be amazed at how simple it is to understand. So, when would be a good time for us to get together?”
- **Objection:** “I don’t believe in the Bible, and I don’t believe in God.”

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**Reply:** “Unless someone could show me that there really was a God, and that the Bible was the divinely inspired Word of God, I wouldn’t believe it either. But, if someone could prove these things, then I would want to know more about this God and His book, the Bible. Wouldn’t you? (The answer will generally be ‘Yes.’) Well, I believe I can give you some very good evidence for believing in God and in the Bible. When can we get together?”

- **Objection:** “No, thank you. I’m really not interested.”

**Reply:** “That’s fine. Perhaps we can get together at a later date. In the meantime, if you ever need to reach me for anything, feel free to give me a call. I would like for us to stay in touch. So I’ll check with you later to see how things are going.”

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# Teaching the Lost

**INTRODUCTION:** In attempting to teach the lost, there are some practical guidelines to follow in setting up the class, in preparing ourselves to teach the class, and in presenting the material. Let's examine these areas one at a time.

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So, how do we go about setting up a Bible study class? Actually, it's relatively simple once we've gotten a commitment for a Bible study. But here are some helpful guidelines that may make the process easier:

- **Agree on a specific day and time.** When choosing a day and time give the person we're studying with a couple of choices. You might say something like this: "So, which would be better for you? Tuesday evening at 7:00, or would Thursday evening be better?" This technique is an attempt to commit to a specific day and time.

However, some may be reluctant to set a specific day and time, and may reply, "I don't know yet. Let me give you a call." How do we handle that obstacle? Our reply could be, "Fine. When can I expect your call?" Wait for an answer, then say, "Okay. If I don't hear from you by then, I'll give you a call back and see when we can get together."

If we can't get a commitment for a specific day and time, we can probably assume they are not really interested at this time. Therefore, we want to leave the door open for a future contact. Always remember that if we promise to call back, we need to do so! Some have failed to call back within a reasonable period of time only to learn that the person they were hoping to study with is now a member of some denomination.

- **We will need to answer the following questions:**
  - **How often should we meet?** That should be left up to the person with whom we are studying. But in most instances, we should attempt to study at least once a week. However, some may want to study more frequently. If our schedule permits, then agree to study as often as we have an opportunity.
  - **How long should each class be?** This should be flexible, and depends on the wishes of the person with whom we are studying, and perhaps on the material itself. Usually, a good length of time is one to one-and-a-half hours. People generally cannot retain much beyond 20 to 30 minutes anyway, so plan on presenting the material with those limitations in mind.

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- **Where should we meet?** Meet anywhere you can study without interruptions. Generally, most people feel comfortable in their own homes. But if you anticipate interruptions from small children, or other factors, you may want to suggest another place – or bring someone with you who can entertain the children while you study.
  - **Should others be invited to the study?** The best way to study is one-to-one. We can make the study much more personal without creating embarrassing or stressful situations when we ask very pointed and thought-provoking questions. However, some we study with may feel more comfortable if a family member is also present. Do whatever is necessary to get the study. But remember the general rule of thumb – the fewer the better.

## How Do I Prepare?

Studying the Word of God with others requires some preparation before we attempt to have our first class. Once we have a commitment to study with someone, we must first make preparation in two specific areas – preparing our heart, and preparing our lesson and the supporting materials.

- **Preparing our heart.** There is absolutely no way we can be effective in teaching the lost unless we have taken time to prepare our heart. To do this we need to spend time in prayer. Before attempting to teach others, there are at least three things for which we should be praying:
  - Pray for wisdom (James 1:5-6).
  - Pray for understanding and enlightenment in the heart of the one with whom we will be studying (Ephesians 1:15-18; Colossians 1:9).
  - Pray that the person with whom we are studying will be reconciled to God (2 Corinthians 5:20; Romans 10:1).

There are two good reasons why praying will increase our chances for success. First, “the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” (James 5:16b), and second, “the Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (1 Peter 3:9).

- **Preparing our lesson and supporting materials.** Preparing the lesson means much more than simply reading through the material once or twice. It means studying and meditating on the things we intend to teach (2 Timothy 2:15; 1 Timothy 4:13-16). Preparing the supporting materials we intend to use is also essential. Whether we are using charts and outlines, a pre-printed study guide, or simply open Bibles, there are a few other tools we may want to take along.

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- **Additional Bibles.** If the person with whom we are studying doesn't have a Bible, then we will want to give them one. It can be a simple, inexpensive "gift" Bible. People who don't own a Bible are generally unfamiliar with where to find various passages. Therefore, it would be wise to make note of the page numbers where various passages we plan to read are located. Then, let them know the book, chapter and verse, and the page number to help them find their place.
  - **Other Translations of the Bible.** We need to make certain we are all using the same translation of the Bible. If possible, bring along an extra version or two (the NIV and New Living Bible are commonly used versions), or ask which translation or version the person with who we are studying with prefers. This eliminates confusion.
  - **A Good Concordance.** Everyone needs a good concordance. This is an invaluable tool to take along on a Bible study, especially when we need to search for a specific passage of Scripture. Don't try to rely on the concordance in the back of your Bible. They are generally very incomplete. Also try to find a concordance that is linked to the same translation of the Bible you are using.
  - **A Tablet and Black Marker Pen.** These will be helpful in drawing illustrations or diagrams you may want to leave behind.

## **Helpful Guides in Teaching Others**

When the time comes for us to have our first Bible study, there are a few basic principles we should remember to make the process go more smoothly. Here are some basic guidelines to keep in mind:

- **Do not call in advance.** If we call to remind our prospect about our appointment, we run the risk of them using that opportunity to cancel. We may hear something like, "Oh, I'm so glad you called, because I just had something come up, and I'm not going to be able to keep our appointment." Therefore, just assume they remember the date and time, and simply show up. If they forgot and need to reschedule, fine. If they are not home, then leave a card or a note saying you came by and will get back in touch with them soon.
- **Arrive on time.** Arriving on time, or even five minutes early, not only saves embarrassment, it shows respect for our prospect's time. If something happens to prevent you from arriving on time, call and let them know. Just remember, calling in advance runs the risk of having them use the opportunity to cancel the class.
- **Agree on some basic beliefs.** If you haven't already established some fundamental beliefs you and the person with whom you are studying have in common, now is the time – before going any further. Make certain everyone agrees on these basic facts:

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- **The Bible is the divinely inspired Word of God.** If the person we are studying with is not confident that the Bible is the Word of God, then we need to begin with a lesson designed to establish that fact.
  - **Jesus Christ is the Son of God.** Some may have doubts about the deity of Jesus Christ or even the existence of God, making it necessary to deal with those facts first.
  - **Ask for permission to defer certain questions to a later time.** It may be helpful to ask the person with whom you are studying to allow you to defer answering questions that are not specifically related to the lesson. It could be that their question may be covered in an upcoming lesson. But assure them you will write down every question that needs to be deferred, and that you will make certain to answer those questions at the appropriate time. This will help avoid getting side-tracked by discussing peripheral issues, and it will give you time to research the answer to questions that may be rather difficult to answer. Don't be afraid to say, "If I don't know the answer to your question, I will write it down, and give you an answer in our next class."
  - **Be certain to begin every study with prayer.** Thank the Lord for giving you this opportunity to study together from God's Word, and pray that your hearts and minds will both be opened to His Word, and that everything you say and do will be in keeping with His will. If the person with whom you are studying wants to lead in prayer, let them.
  - **Speak frequently to the person most interested.** If there is more than one person being taught, speak more frequently to the person who shows the most interest. This will make them realize you're interested in them, and it also helps from becoming discouraged by looking at someone who shows little or no interest.
  - **Be tolerant of others views without sacrificing the truth.** We cannot expect others to listen to what we have to say unless we are also willing to listen to them. We can respectfully say we don't agree with their conclusions, and explain why. But this is certainly not the time or the place for argumentation and debate.
  - **Let the Bible answer their questions.** We should take every opportunity to answer questions by turning to specific passages of Scripture that deal with the subject. We can say something like, "Let's see what the Bible says about this." We need to encourage those with whom we study to be like the noble Bereans who, "were more fair-minded than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." (Acts 17:11).

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Methods of teaching the lost vary with every teacher. But there are some things we can do to make our method of teaching more effective. Here are some additional guidelines for teaching others the gospel of Christ.

- **Stress the fact that we are teaching God's word.** There is a vast difference between the Word of God and opinion. Therefore we should point out the difference, and stress that everything we teach will be backed up with Scripture. Invite the person with whom you are studying to point out anything you teach that is not in keeping with God's word. If someone asks, "What does the church of Christ teach on this subject," reply by saying something like, "We believe and teach only what the Bible teaches. Here, let me show you."
- **Always stay on the subject.** As mentioned earlier, questions will often arise that will tend to shift the lesson completely off-track, and cause us to lose our focus. Those questions should be deferred, and answered at a later time. No one profits from a lesson that is constantly being side-tracked for one reason or another.
- **Plan on teaching only one lesson.** There are two reasons why we need to plan on teaching only one lesson. First, we don't want to confuse those with whom we are studying by trying to cover too much ground during the first lesson. Therefore, plan on teaching only one lesson at a time. The second reason we need to plan only one lesson is because this may be our one and only opportunity to study with this person. If you realize you will probably never have another Bible study, try to end this one by briefly covering what one must do to be saved. Wouldn't it be tragic if we left without telling them anything about the hope of salvation they can have in Jesus Christ?

## The Materials

Some Bible study material is very structured and leaves little or no room to tailor the lessons to fit the individual needs. While this may work for some, it certainly won't work for all. Other material assumes the person with whom we are studying believes the Bible is God's Word, and that Jesus is the Son of God. Unfortunately, not everyone agrees with those basic assertions. Therefore, flexibility is key to the success of practically every Bible study. However, there are some basic lessons that will be of benefit to practically everyone. Here are some suggested lessons.

- **The Inspired Word of God.** If someone has doubts about the reliability of the Bible, this lesson will be helpful in answering some of those objections. This lesson is also good for building confidence in those who already believe the Word of God is divinely inspired. It assures us that the Scriptures did not originate with man, but came through the process of verbal inspiration, and that the Bible can be understood. (For further reading on this subject see: *Evidence That Demands A Verdict*, Volume I, by Josh McDowell).

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- **The Empty Tomb.** This lesson is good for those who are either atheists or agnostics (skeptics). It establishes the fact that Jesus is declared to be the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead (Romans 1:1-3). This lesson explores the various theories put forth by skeptics in attempting to refute the claims made by the disciples of Jesus that He was resurrected from the dead. (For further reading on this subject see: *Evidence That Demands A Verdict, Volume I*, by Josh McDowell).
  - **Lord, Liar or Lunatic?** This lesson examines what C. S. Lewis called “The Trilemma” – that Jesus is either our Lord, a Liar, or a Lunatic. It takes a close look at the three choices one faces when examining the claims of Jesus that He was the Son of God. It’s a lesson that’s also good for atheists or agnostics (skeptics), since it keeps anyone from saying Jesus was simply a good man or a great teacher, and forces them to conclude that Jesus was either a liar of the worst kind for claiming to be the Son of God, or that He was a lunatic with delusions of grandeur, or that He is truly the Lord. (For further reading on this subject see: *Evidence That Demands A Verdict, Volume I*, by Josh McDowell).
  - **The Three Dispensations of Time.** This lesson provides a good overview of Bible history from Genesis through the establishment of the church in the first century A.D., and also briefly addresses the Second Coming of Christ. It stresses the strictness of God in requiring man to do things His way, speaks of the difference between the old and new covenants, examines prophecies regarding the establishment of the kingdom, and the fulfillment of those prophecies in the establishment of the church in Acts chapter two. This lesson is good for those unfamiliar with the Bible, as well as being a good review for those who are familiar with the Word of God.
  - **Our Need For A Savior.** Those who may be unfamiliar with why Jesus came to offer Himself as a sacrifice for our sins may benefit from this lesson. The lesson is divided into three parts. Part one shows that our problem began with the introduction of sin into the world by Adam and Eve. Part two goes on to show that God has a remedy for sin. Finally, in part three, we see what we must do to be saved. This lesson is helpful in showing that we do not inherit Adam’s sin, but that we are sinners because we have all sinned. Furthermore, it shows that without Jesus Christ, we could have no hope of salvation.
  - **Examples of Conversion.** This lesson takes the examples of conversion found in the Book of Acts, and examines each one more closely. It shows there are three things that are consistent with every conversion – they heard the Word of God, they believed Jesus to be the Son of God, and they were baptized. This lesson is also very helpful in allowing people to compare and contrast their own conversion experience with those found in Scripture.

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- **Searching For The New Testament Church.** Those who may have difficulty seeing that the church is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies concerning the establishment of a kingdom, or who believe in a millennial kingdom on earth, will benefit from this lesson. It focuses on two of the more prominent prophecies, Isaiah 2:2-4 and Daniel 2:31-45, and shows their fulfillment in the establishment of the church. This lesson also speaks about the identifying marks or characteristics of the church in New Testament times. Those identifying marks will help us find the same church today.
  - **Churches (Denominations) Today.** This lesson may be used as a supplement to “Searching For The New Testament Church.” It shows how the various churches (denominations) today are different from the New Testament church in areas such as baptism, names, the Lord’s Supper, organization, giving, music, and what each teaches on eternity. Be aware that this lesson identifies various denominations by name, and could put the person with whom we are studying on the defensive.
  - **The Cost of Discipleship.** It is important to stress to everyone who desires to become a disciple of Jesus Christ that there are costs involved – personal sacrifices we must make if we are to truly make Jesus the Lord of our life. These sacrifices may include giving up certain associates, certain pastimes, certain jobs, or even an unscriptural marriage or other relationship. The lesson is designed for everyone, but especially for those who need to seriously consider these choices before committing themselves to obeying the gospel.
  - **Heaven and Hell (The Final Judgment).** The focus of this lesson is to help those we study with understand what happens after death. It deals with the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke chapter 16, and then moves on to show the sequence of events following death, including the final judgment.

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# Answering Questions

**INTRODUCTION:** When we are presenting a lesson, there will almost certainly be a wide variety of questions. The attitude we demonstrate in answering these questions will contribute substantially to the success of our study. But, behind every question is a reason for asking that question. When we understand the kinds of questions we are being asked, it may help us understand why they are being asked, as well as help us give the most appropriate answer.

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It has been said a good teacher stimulates his students to ask questions. Therefore, we should always consider questions a healthy sign, because they show the person with whom we are studying is listening and taking an active part in the study itself. Whenever possible, we should honestly commend them for their question by saying something like, “that’s a good question,” or “I’m glad you asked that.” We should then proceed to answer any question that can be answered by reading the passages of Scripture being discussed in the lesson at hand.

## Eight Types of Questions

There are basically eight “types” or “kinds” of questions one may ask. Let’s take a closer look at the various “types” or “kinds” of questions most frequently asked, and learn the appropriate way of answering them.

- **The sincere question.** People who are sincerely interested in learning more about the truth will generally always ask what we may call “sincere questions.” They honestly want to know what the Bible teaches. Perhaps one of the best examples of a sincere question is found in Peter’s sermon on the day of Pentecost: “Men and brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37b). Peter gave a very simple and direct answer to their sincere question: “Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all who are afar off, as many as the Lord our God will call.” (Acts 2:38-39).
- **The premature question.** Sometimes we may be asked a question before the person asking has the basic Bible knowledge needed to properly understand the answer. If we attempt to answer a premature question, we will either confuse those with whom we study or prejudice their thinking before we have a chance to teach them more. Like a blooming flower, some people need time to grow into a proper understanding

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of the basics before they can blossom. If we try to force a flower to bloom before its time, we will destroy it. Delaying an answer to a premature question may be difficult to do, but it's both practical and Scriptural. Jesus did not answer the premature question His disciples asked about restoring the kingdom to Israel (Acts 1:6), but, in so many words, told them they would get the answer at a later time.

- **The prejudiced question.** The prejudiced question is generally intended to arouse bias or drive a wedge between the teacher and the one asking the question. For example, we may be asked, “Do you believe that you have to be baptized in order to be saved,” or “isn't your church the one that thinks they're the only ones going to heaven?” There is only one way to answer a prejudiced question – with great patience and self-control. If we become angry or upset, we've lost the battle. This is truly a time when we need to “be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” (James 1:19). Therefore, treat every prejudiced question as if it were sincere. We also have some wonderful examples of how to handle prejudiced questions from the teachings of Jesus. He was asked prejudiced questions about His authority (Matthew 21:23-27), concerning the payment of taxes to Rome (Matthew 22:15-22), about the resurrection (Matthew 22:23-33), and concerning which is the greatest commandment (Matthew 22:34-46).
- **The unanswerable question.** Sometimes we may be asked a question we don't know how to answer, or one for which there may be no answer. One of the main reasons why most people are afraid to study the Bible with someone else is simply because they're afraid of being asked a question they can't answer. However, there is simply no way we can possibly prepare ourselves to answer every question we might be asked. Therefore, never be ashamed to say, “I don't know, but I'll try to find out and give you an answer at our next Bible study.” Not knowing the answer, but taking time to research the question, can have some positive results. It shows we don't know everything, and that we're a student of the Bible just like everyone else. It also shows that we can never be satisfied with an answer unless it comes from the Bible. There are also questions for which there are no answers – questions like, “what kind of fruit did Adam and Eve eat when they sinned,” or “what does heaven look like?” The best way to answer that kind of question is to say, “I don't believe the Bible gives us the answer to that question, but I'll do a little checking.”
- **The self-answered question.** This kind of question is asked without really expecting an answer – it's a rhetorical question. For example, when the person with whom we are studying says, “Well, I guess I need to be baptized, don't I?” – that is a self-answered question. They already know the answer. Therefore, we can reply by either agreeing or by answering their self-answered question with a question such as, “What do you think?” A good example of a self-answered question is found in the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:35-36). After Philip preached unto him Jesus, the eunuch asked, “See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?”

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(Acts 8:36). The eunuch already answered his own question. He knew there was nothing that should prevent him from being baptized into Christ that very moment. The only response to his question is found in verse 37, which some translations omit.

- **The evasive question.** Some questions will be asked that are intended to either lead to, or lead away from, the real issue in the mind of the person asking the question. For example, we might be asked, “Does God completely forgive us of every sin when we are baptized?” Most of us would be quick to respond, “Absolutely!” However, this question may have been asked because that person is presently living in adultery and wants to know if obeying the Gospel will affect their marriage. If we feel there is an underlying reason for the question being asked, we should probably respond with, “Why do you ask?” Once the real problem is defined we will stand a greater chance of leading them to Christ.

Jesus was asked evasive questions. One example is the series of questions asked by the rich young ruler (Matthew 19:16-22). First, the young man asked Jesus, “Good Teacher, what good thing shall I do that I may have eternal life?” (Matthew 19:16). When Jesus told him to “keep the commandments,” he replied, “Which ones?” After Jesus answered that question, the young man replied, “All these things I have kept from my youth. What do I still lack?” (Matthew 19:20). Jesus then proceeded to tell him to go and sell all he had and give it to the poor. The story ends with the young man going away sorrowful, “for he had great possessions.” (Matthew 19:22). The real question in the mind of this rich young ruler was not what he could do to inherit eternal life, but what could he do to inherit eternal life without giving up his “great possessions.”

- **The irrelevant question.** This can also be called a side-track question, because it generally gets the discussion completely off-track. The danger of this kind of question is that it may side-track the discussion for hours, causing everyone to lose track of the point that was under discussion. Whether we choose to answer it or defer it to another time, we need to get back to the main subject as quickly as possible.
- **The loaded question.** Like the prejudiced question, the loaded question is often meant as a snare to lead us into a series of more difficult questions – generally to a prejudiced question. Once again, we need to heed the admonition given by James: “be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” (James 1:19). For example, we may be asked, “Do you believe the *whole* Bible?” Our reply would naturally be, “Yes.” But then comes the real question. “Well, why don’t you use instrumental music in your worship like they did in the Old Testament?” Now we are obligated to explain the differences between the Old and the New Testaments, and essentially show how we go about establishing Scriptural authority.

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Jesus was also asked loaded questions. Almost every time the scribes and Pharisees, or the Sadducees asked Jesus a question, they were hoping to force Him to provide answers that would arouse prejudice in the hearts of His hearers. Since we may not be able to answer loaded questions with the same degree of finesse as Jesus, perhaps the best way to answer this kind of question is to say, “Why do you ask?”

## Effective Ways of Answering Questions

Now that we understand the various “types” or “kinds” of questions we might be asked, let’s examine some effective ways of answering those questions. Questions can be answered in a variety of ways.

- **We may answer a question with a question.** Jesus used this technique in dealing with the question posed to Him by the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 15:1-3). When they asked Jesus, “Why do Your disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? For they do not wash their hands when they eat bread,” the Scriptures tell us Jesus replied by asking a question of His own: “Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?” He also used this same manner of answering a question when His authority was challenged. The chief priests and the elders of the people confronted Him as He was teaching, and said, “By what authority are You doing these things? And who gave You this authority?” (Matthew 21:23) But Jesus replied by asking them a question – a loaded question. He said, “I also will ask you one thing, which if you tell Me, I likewise will tell you by what authority I do these things: The baptism of John; where was it from? From heaven or from men?” (Matthew 21:24-25). The chief priests and the elders were trapped, and refused to answer. And so, Jesus was no longer obligated to answer theirs.
- **A question may be answered with an illustration.** Jesus was asked by a lawyer, “Who is my neighbor?” (Luke 10:29). Jesus illustrated His answer by telling the story about a good Samaritan (Luke 10:30-37). Jesus often answered questions with an illustration or a parable. We can use this technique as well. We may not be able to give an illustration of our own, or tell our own parable, but we can use those found in the Scriptures. For example, we might be asked, “Do I need to be baptized again, since I was baptized once already in the Baptist church?” To answer that question, we might choose to give the illustration found in Acts 19:1-5.
- **We can help them answer their own question.** When Jesus was asked by the rich young ruler what he should do to inherit eternal life, Jesus directed him to the Scriptures, then asked him how he understood the Scriptures (Luke 10:25-28). We can do likewise by encouraging the person with whom we are studying to turn to a particular passage, read it aloud or silently, and explain to us how they understand this Scripture. In essence, they are answering their own question.

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- **We can certainly answer a question through Christ and the apostles.** If we simply give our opinion rather than answer a question by going to the Scriptures, those with whom we study may feel justified in disagreeing with us – after all, they see our opinion as just that, an opinion. But if we were asked a question, and we replied, “Let’s see what Christ or the apostles had to say on the subject,” there will be little room for disagreement. Let the Scriptures speak for themselves. When possible, turn to the appropriate Scripture, read it together, and let the Bible answer their question.

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# Moving Toward the Moment of Decision

**INTRODUCTION:** Our ultimate goal is to “save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins” (James 5:20). To do this, we will eventually come to the moment in our study when we will be asking our prospect to make the most important decision of their life. There is a tendency on the part of some to force those with whom they are studying to respond favorably to the gospel invitation before they are fully committed. Nothing can be more destructive to their eternal welfare. Try to imagine what would happen if you took a rose bud and tried to force its pedals open to form a flower. You would bruise the flower so badly that its pedals would fall off and the flower would eventually die. The same thing happens to those who are forced to respond favorably to the gospel invitation before they are ready. They will eventually feel as though they have been pressured into doing something they were not ready to do, and they may eventually leave the Lord. If the only way for a rose bud to become a beautiful flower is for it to bloom on its own, then those to whom we have given the message of the gospel of Christ must have time to “bloom” on their own. Therefore, how can we be most effective in leading someone to the moment of decision without pressuring them into doing something for which they are not ready?

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**T**he ultimate aim of every Bible study is to lead someone to Christ – to see them baptized into Christ, and develop into a mature and faithful Christian. Unfortunately, many studies end with no visible or immediate results because the proper foundation was not laid. Leading someone to Christ is rarely accomplished in the first lesson, but we can begin with the first lesson to lay the foundation that may eventually result in their obedience to the gospel of Christ.

Here are some guidelines for laying the proper foundation:

- **Develop interest in what we are teaching.** Prejudice and indifference are often threats to the success of a Bible study. We can generally reduce both of these factors by presenting each lesson with enthusiasm. If seeking the kingdom of God and His righteousness is first in our life, then it will be easier to convince others it needs to be their priority as well.
- **Become their friend.** The one factor that probably drew people to Jesus more than any other was the fact that He was warm, compassionate, friendly, and took a genuine interest in the spiritual welfare of those with whom He talked. That’s the goal for us. We need to be warm, compassionate, friendly, and take a genuine interest in the

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spiritual welfare of others as well. People know the difference between those who are simply interested in making another convert, and those who are genuinely interested in their soul. Therefore, we need to build a real friendship, and assure them that they will continue to be our friend regardless of the outcome of our study together.

- **Get to know them personally.** Friendships are built when people take the time to get to know each other personally. Encourage them to talk about their family, their hopes and dreams, their special interests, and their religious background. Learn to be a good listener.
- **Pray for them.** Take the name of each person with whom we are studying before the throne of God every day, and pray for them by name at the beginning of every Bible study. Let them know that you pray for them every day. Tell them it is your prayer that they will think seriously about the things you study together, and that God will help them understand His will for them.

## Preparing for the Moment

As we move toward the point of decision, we are approaching a moment when we must lovingly confront the person with whom we have been studying with the fact that in their present condition, they are lost and in need of a Savior. This can certainly create a crisis situation. How do we prepare for that moment? The impact of this kind of confrontation can be lessened somewhat if we have followed some basic guidelines when teaching each lesson.

- **Make certain they understand each lesson.** At the conclusion of each lesson we may want to ask, “Is there anything we discussed that you do not understand, or would like to discuss further?” We might think we did a good job of covering all the important facts in the lesson, but those with whom we study may still be somewhat confused about certain points. Just because it’s familiar to us doesn’t mean it’s familiar to them. If necessary, quickly review the main points again and ask if this seems to clear up any confusion.
- **Hold nothing back.** We might be reluctant to discuss certain points on which we are certain there will be some disagreement. However, we must be able to say to those with whom we study the same thing Paul told the Ephesian elders: “For I have not shunned to declare to you the whole counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Discussing areas of potential disagreement should be postponed until we have laid a proper foundation from the Scriptures. We need to stress that God requires us to obey His will regardless of our own personal preferences. But once we have done that, we need to proceed with presenting the truth in a kind and loving manner – holding nothing back.

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- **Don't be afraid to compare and contrast their beliefs with what the Bible teaches.** The best way to do this is to first establish what the Bible teaches on the subject. We might begin by saying, “I realize there are a few differences between us. Let me show you what I understand the Bible to teach, and then I would like to hear how you understand these things.” While we are presenting what the Bible teaches on a particular subject, we can be certain our prospect is making comparisons and contrasts of their own. After we have clearly established what the Bible teaches, we might ask, “Is this how you understand the Scriptures on this matter?” If we’ve done our job of presenting the Scriptural method, those we study with will generally realize they are not disagreeing with us but with the Bible itself. If they say, “Isn’t that just your interpretation?” Try this approach – say something like, “Well, let’s change roles here for a moment. Let me ask you how you understand this passage.” When they attempt to explain the passage, we can then ask, “I hear what you are saying, but is that really how the passage reads?” Assuming they are honest, sooner or later, they will see for themselves how their beliefs conflict with the Bible.
  - **Appeal to the Scriptures at all times.** Establish every truth from the Word of God. No one is interested in our opinions – they want to know what God says. Therefore, we need to constantly appeal to the Scriptures as our only authority. Ask those with whom we are studying if they believe everything we have presented is from the Bible. The question might be phrased something like, “Have I shown you from the Bible what you need to do to be saved (or how to identify the New Testament church)? I haven’t said, ‘this is church of Christ doctrine,’ have I? I’ve shown you what the Scriptures teach, right? That’s because the Bible is our only authority.”

## Moving the Study to the Point of Decision

Surprisingly, many Christians have presented a series of lessons covering virtually everything needed to lead a person to Christ, and yet, never ask for a decision. Therefore, after we have laid the proper foundation and have successfully presented several lessons, how do we finally move those with whom we study to the point of decision?

Here are some practical guidelines for bringing the discussion to a point of decision:

- **Make it clear what they need to do.** We need to make our closing perfectly clear, and leave absolutely no doubt whatsoever as to what is needed for those with whom we study to complete their obedience to Christ. If necessary, briefly review the steps leading to conversion, and ask if they understand these points. It may also be necessary to ask them if they believe they have followed the New Testament examples of conversion with their own. If they are unsure, let them know that when they became a member of a particular denomination, they were probably taught and believed what that denomination teaches about salvation. Contrast that with what the Bible teaches. When it is clear in their mind that they have not followed the New

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Testament pattern, ask them again if they understand what the Bible teaches on becoming a Christian.

- **Be prepared to deal with strong emotions.** Most denominational people honestly believe they are saved. It's not easy for them to suddenly admit they are wrong and are lost. This moment may be filled with some very strong emotions. Invariably, some will ask, "But what about all the people who believe they're saved and haven't had a chance to hear all the things you've shown me?" One possible reply might be, "I'm going to let God be their judge. But you're not in the same category as they are – you know the truth. So there won't be any way you can stand before the Lord on the day of Judgment and say, 'I didn't know.'"
- **Ask for a decision.** When they clearly understand what they need to do to be saved, ask them to make a decision. One of the most effective ways to move those with whom we study to a point of decision, is to simply say, "I'm going to ask you the same thing that Ananias asked Saul of Tarsus in Acts 22:16, 'And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.'" Once you have asked for a decision **DON'T SAY ANOTHER WORD!** Give the person with whom you have been studying time to think and meditate, and, if necessary, give them an opportunity to express their feelings. If they ask additional questions or make additional comments, deal with them in an appropriate manner, then ask for a decision once more, and **DON'T SAY ANOTHER WORD!**

When we reach this point in our discussion, the person with whom we have been studying will generally respond in one of four ways.

- **Some will be ready to immediately accept and obey the gospel of Christ.** In this case, we need to assure them they are making the right decision, and proceed to have them baptized into Christ immediately. There are several examples in the Scriptures of people who responded in this manner, including those on Pentecost who "gladly received" Peter's word (Acts 2:36-41), and the Ethiopian eunuch who obeyed without hesitation and "went on his way rejoicing" (Acts 8:35-39).
- **Others will become shocked upon learning they are lost or are in religious error.** When faced with this type of reaction exercise great compassion, because they will more than likely need encouragement to make the right decision. This is also a time when many will begin to worry about loved ones who may have already died without having had a chance to hear these truths. We need to genuinely share their concerns. We can assure them that a loving and merciful God will judge all mankind, without giving them any false hopes. But eventually we will need to bring them back to the point of decision – they need to decide whether or not they will obey the gospel.

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- **Still others will become defiant.** Regardless of our best efforts, a few will simply close their hearts and minds to the truth. They will decline any further opportunities for a Bible study. Surprising as it may seem, most people will not respond this way. But for those few who do, leave the door open for future contacts. And above all, reassure them that they are still your friend, and you'll continue praying for them.
  - **Most who do not respond positively will remain undecided.** Indecision is still a decision. And whether or not those with whom we have been studying realizes it, they have made a decision to remain where they are for the time being. It is quite appropriate for us to ask why they are choosing to remain undecided. Be prepared to listen carefully to everything they say. This is a good time to remain silent and let them do the talking. If they continue to remain undecided, tell them that you appreciate their need to think these things over, especially since they are making the most important decision of the lifetime. But it is also important to remind them that they are still in their sins, and until they obey the gospel of Christ they run the risk of being lost.

Respect their need to think these things through, but assure them that you will be back in a few days to check on them. In the meantime, if they change their mind, make certain they have your telephone number, and ask them to call you anytime, day or night, if they decide they want to be baptized into Christ. When you return, if there is still hesitation, plan on delivering the lesson "Heaven and Hell (The Final Judgment)." Try closing the class by reading two passages of Scripture: 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 followed by 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10. The first passage is a message of hope, while the second passage is a message of warning. After reading these passages ask this question: "If the Lord were to come back at this moment, which group do you believe you would be in – the one described in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, or the one described in 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10?" Close once again by asking for a decision, and **DON'T SAY ANOTHER WORD!**

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# Teach, Baptize, then Teach Again

**INTRODUCTION:** In the Great Commission, Jesus said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matthew 28:19-20). Teaching the gospel of Christ to the lost, and leading them to Christ is only the first step in making one a disciple of Christ. In fact, the process has only just begun. We now need to teach “them to observe all things” we have been commanded to observe as a disciple of Christ. Nurturing a newborn Christian is an eternally important task. We know from nature that if a beautiful plant is neglected it will eventually die. The same thing may happen to those we have been led to Christ, unless we do something to nourish them. So, what can we do to lessen the chances of this happening?

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**N**urturing the newborn disciple of Christ requires patience and persistence. We must never make the mistake of expecting too much too soon. Just as a newborn baby is not expected to eat or walk on their own, neither should we expect unrealistic accomplishments from the newborn disciple of Christ. We will therefore be required to exercise a lot of patience, while at the same time persistently urging them toward spiritual growth.

What can we do to effectively nurture newborn Christians?

- **Work with only a few at a time.** It is easy for us to lose sight of the fact that we are trying to help people go to heaven rather than simply seeing them baptized into Christ. Unfortunately, some who come to the Lord end up drifting away. Therefore, the ultimate goal is helping the new Christian grow and mature spiritually so they will not only be able to assume their rightful place in the Lord’s body, but remain faithful until death. Doing this will require a lot of our time. And since most of us are somewhat limited with time, we need to keep the number of those with whom we work down to a manageable few. It’s far better spending a year or two thoroughly grounding a few than constantly trying to convert the world, only to see them regularly fall away from lack of proper attention.
- **Spend time together.** Every new Christian is facing the same threat – the pull of the world. After they obey the gospel, their world will be much the same as it was before. They will have the same family members, they may work around the same people or

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attend the same school, they will have the same neighbors, and may even keep the same friends – at least for a while, anyway. All of these influences will be pulling at them to be the same person they were before obeying the gospel. Therefore, they need someone who can help them hold steadfast to the new convictions to which they have committed themselves. This is where we come in.

To help these new Christians combat the constant pull of the world, we need to give them our time. We need to be with them as often as possible without manipulating their time or their life. This time together can be spent in any number of ways: studying the Bible, ministering to the needs of others, or teaching the lost. This will not only help them combat the pull of the world, it will also help them to see Christianity in action.

- **Help them find their place in the Body of Christ.** While it is important to spend time together with a new Christian, it is also vitally important to set certain goals for them to attain. There is something for everyone to do in the Body of Christ, and there is a place where this new Christian can fit in as well. At first, they might be assigned rather nominal tasks such as, handing out visitor cards, passing out bulletins, preparing the elements for the Lord’s Supper, helping to organize an Evangelistic Bible Study, etc. But in time, they need to be given other responsibilities that are suited to their individual abilities, and that stretch them as a Christian, such as, calling or visiting the sick, checking on those who are absent from services, greeting visitors, leading in prayer, waiting on the Lord’s Table, being a teacher’s assistant in a class of young children, etc. Eventually, they need to be challenged with the works of service expected of every mature Christian, such as, teaching the lost and ministering to the saints.
- **Help them carry their burdens.** Sooner or later, there will be setbacks in the lives of most new Christians. These are difficult times when trials of various kinds threaten to choke out the Word that has been planted in their lives. The apostle Paul said, “Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). The burden under discussion here is anything too heavy for someone to bear alone. They need someone to talk with – someone who will listen to their problem and offer sound, spiritual advice. At times like this, it is especially important to encourage the new Christian to bring their burden to the elders of the church. They need to understand that the elders are the spiritual Shepherds of the flock, and have a God-given responsibility to bind and heal the wounds of the flock (Ezekiel 34:4). Encouraging every new Christian to let others help them bear their burdens is critically important.

The most effective way we can help the new Christian mature is to provide a living demonstration in our own life. When we spend time with those whom we have led to Christ, we may want to consider using that time demonstrating what is most important to us as a Christian. There is an old saying that goes, “I would rather see a sermon any day than

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here one.” There is a lot of wisdom in that statement. We can teach quite a lot by simply showing others where our priorities lay. Here are a few suggestions.

- **Demonstrate the place of prayer in our life.** Jesus constantly demonstrated the importance of prayer in His life while in the presence of His disciples. They witnessed the strength and comfort He received from spending time with His Father in heaven. He also taught them how to pray (Matthew 6:9-13). Here is a wonderful example for us as well. We need to be constant in prayer – to “pray without ceasing” (1 Thessalonians 5:17). And we should take every opportunity to pray with those whom we have led to Christ. This not only helps them understand the importance of prayer in the life of every Christian, but it helps them learn to pray on their own. We should also encourage them to pray with us. This gives them the chance to express the feelings of their heart publicly, and will eventually help them learn to lead in prayer.
- **Demonstrate the place of the Scriptures in our life.** Familiarity with the Word of God is essential to our growth and development as a Christian. Psalms 119 is filled with reasons why the Scriptures are so important to our everyday life. We should spend time with God’s Word every day, thinking and meditating on the divinely inspired truths revealed in it. And we should spend time reading and studying with those whom we have led to Christ. They need to see the importance of God’s Word in our life, and the best way to demonstrate that is to share moments in the Word with them. We can help them learn how to study the Bible on their own by familiarizing them with the books and the divisions of the Bible, and by giving them some simple research projects to complete.
- **Demonstrate the place of worship in our lives.** Being faithful in our attendance is sending a clear message to those whom we lead to Christ. It tells them that we place assembling with the saints above every other activity in our lives. We’re never late because that would show disrespect. And when we worship, we worship in spirit and in truth. We become totally and completely involved in our worship of God and His Son Jesus Christ, worshipping with our whole heart. We can also demonstrate the importance of worship in our lives by participating in Bible class, and if possible, taking an active role in one or more aspects of the worship services, such as waiting on the Lord’s table, leading in prayer, leading in singing, or teaching a class. And when opportunities come along to attend a gospel meeting, we will be there as well, perhaps inviting those whom we have led to Christ to go with us.
- **Demonstrate the place of ministering to the saints in our lives.** We should never do our works for the purpose of receiving the praise of others. A servant certainly doesn’t attempt to draw attention to himself. But we can encourage the new Christian to place an emphasis on serving others in their life by seeing it in ours first. We can encourage them to go with us to visit the sick, encourage the weak, restore the erring, and all the other works of service we can perform for our brothers and

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sisters in Christ. This provides a wonderful opportunity for the new Christian to not only see how these works can be done, but to gradually learn to do them on their own.

- **Demonstrate the place of teaching the lost in our lives.** Before we can expect a new Christian to teach others, several things must first take place. They must become acquainted with the Scriptures and know how to use them. They must develop a genuine love for the lost. And they should have an opportunity to see how others are taught by going with us whenever possible.

Eventually, the time will come when we need to encourage those whom we have led to Christ to assume their role of ministering to the saints and seeking the lost. The Great Commission that Jesus gave to His disciples began a chain reaction of teaching, baptizing, and teaching to observe all things, and has now come down through the ages to us. We need to urge those whom we have taught to eventually step forward and assume their responsibility to encourage others and eventually lead others to Christ. The new Christian needs to be preparing to accomplish this task. Here are a few immediate goals to keep in mind.

- **Bear much fruit.** In some of the final remarks Jesus made to His apostles before leading them to the Mount of Olives, He said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.” (John 15:5-8). Bearing fruit is as much a responsibility for us as it was for the apostles. Although bearing fruit is not limited to leading others to Christ, it certainly includes that activity. We need to be fruitful in all areas of our lives – from personal growth and development, to growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord, to ministering to the saints, to leading others to Christ. Jesus said this is how the Father is glorified – by our bearing much fruit. And this is also the mark of every true disciple of Christ. Those who are not attempting to be fruitful by preparing themselves to help lead others to Christ are not doing their part in fulfilling the Great Commission. Sadly, this is one reason the harvest is so great while the laborers are so few.
- **Pray for harvesters.** Matthew’s account tells us that when Jesus, “saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, “The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” (Matthew 9:36-38). Jesus had already demonstrated by His own personal ministry that the masses were ripe for harvest, but the laborers were few. Nothing has changed over the course of history. The “harvest

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truly is plentiful,” but the laborers are still few in number. People are still groping around in their sins, spiritually blinded to the hope in Jesus Christ. And because laborers are so few in number, countless millions are still dying in their sins every day. The only hope for the world is for laborers to go to them with the message of salvation, and to lead them to Christ. Every new Christian should be praying for the Lord to send forth laborers in the vineyard.

- **“Go make disciples!”** The words of Jesus in the Great Commission are very clear. To His disciples, He said, “Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:19-20). The command of Jesus to His disciples was not to merely go to the ends of the earth and preach the gospel of Christ, nor was it to simply baptize mass numbers of people. The command was to “make disciples” for the Lord. It was to reproduce in others the same commitment to the Lord they shared among themselves. A disciple is a follower or a learner of someone – in this case, a follower and learner of Jesus Christ. It should be the goal of every new Christian to “make disciples” for Jesus Christ, leading those who are lost to an understanding of the gospel of Christ, and stressing the necessity of their surrendering their whole life to Jesus as their Lord and Savior. Then, leading those disciples of Christ to go do likewise – to “make disciples” for the Lord themselves. This is the real test of spiritual maturity, namely, when we can reproduce ourselves in others and have them do likewise.

There is a reason why Jesus chose twelve average men to be His disciples and to go forth and evangelize the world. If twelve men with little or no formal education could literally turn the world upside down by relying on the power of God rather than on their own talents and abilities, we can do the same. We need to instill in the minds of every new Christian a few basic facts that will help them succeed.

- **Remember, the power is in the Word, not in ourselves.** In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul wrote, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes, for the Jew first and also for the Greek.” (Romans 1:16). The word Paul used for “power” is from the Greek “dunamis,” which means “force, miraculous power, might and strength.” The apostle wanted his readers to know that the gospel of Christ is the “force, miraculous power, might and strength” God uses to bring the lost to salvation. This is why the apostle Paul would later write to the young evangelist Timothy, “Preach the word! Be ready in season and out of season. Convince, rebuke, exhort, with all longsuffering and teaching.” (2 Timothy 4:2). The power to convert the lost to Jesus Christ is in the Word, not in the one who preaches it. Although the apostles were given miraculous powers to confirm the Word, those miracles didn’t win souls to Christ – the Word did! And this is the same Word we need to be preaching today. It still has the same power to dislodge even the most stubborn of hearts and lead a lost soul to Christ.

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Therefore, the better we know the Word, the more effective we will be in saving a soul from death and hiding a multitude of sins (cf. James 5:20).

- **Remember the promise of Jesus: “I will be with you always!”** Just as the apostles of Christ would not be alone in their task of converting a lost world to Christ, neither will we. Jesus promises to be with those who undertake the responsibility of fulfilling the Great Commission. That promise should give everyone courage to go forward on their quest to teach, baptize, and teach again. In reality, there is nothing we need to fear. Perhaps this is why the writer of the Hebrew epistle wrote a similar message to his readers: “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, “I will never leave you nor forsake you. So we may boldly say: ‘The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?’” (Hebrews 13:5-6). If the Lord Himself promises to never leave us nor forsake us, what do we have to fear? The promise that Jesus will be with us always, and that the Lord will never leave us nor forsake us needs to be implanted deep within the heart of every new Christian. Satan will use every means to cast doubts and fears before us in an attempt to deter us from fulfilling our mission of converting a lost world to Christ. But we can overcome those doubts and fears by knowing we are taking every step with the Lord by our side. He will be with us always!

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# Conclusion

## Be Strong, and Work!

**INTRODUCTION:** In the Old Testament book of Ezra we find the story of the laying of the foundation for the second Temple in the city of Jerusalem. The Temple of Solomon and Jerusalem were first plundered by the Babylonian conqueror Nebuchadnezzar in 597 B.C., then burned by Nebuzaradan, his general, in 587/586 B.C. The decree of Cyrus in 538 B.C. permitted the Jews to return from the Babylonian exile with the Temple vessels that had been taken. It charged them to rebuild the Temple in Jerusalem with Persian financial aid and free-will offerings from Jews who remained in Babylon (Ezra 1:1-4). But the initial eagerness to clear away all the debris and rebuild the Temple soon came to a stop when the Jews in Jerusalem faced opposition from the Samaritans (Ezra 4:2-5). Eventually, a decree forbidding work was obtained, and for about fifteen years the work ceased and the house of God continued to lay in ruins. And yet, all the time, neither danger nor difficulty nor poverty prevented them from building their own houses: paneled houses of beauty and luxury. When the decree was finally lifted, the Jews in Jerusalem continued to be indifferent toward rebuilding the Temple. They said, "The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." (Haggai 1:2). So, God raised up the prophet Haggai to reprove them for their laziness and spur them into action.

The house of God had been neglected long enough. Today, the same need exists and for the same reason. To the Jews in Ezra's day, there was no sense of urgency to build the house of the Lord. As far as they were concerned, it could wait. They were more concerned about providing for their own personal comfort.

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Sadly, when we look back to the days of Ezra and consider how they neglected the house of God, we see a striking similarity in the attitude of many today towards the Lord's church: "The time has not come, the time that the Lord's house should be built." There seems to be no sense of urgency to build the Lord's house. Although the Temple was entirely material, God's house today is spiritual. Peter tells us we are, "Coming to Him [Christ] as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 2:4-5). There is a vital and pressing need for the Lord's church to be built up in every community. Countless millions of souls are being lost around us every day while we continue to focus on our own needs and personal comfort.

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To those in his day, Haggai said, “Be strong... and work!” (Haggai 2:4). The same admonition needs to be said to us as well. Strength and work cannot be separated. There can be no work apart from strength, nor strength that does not express itself in work. Therefore, every church needs to be a strong and working church. But what are the ingredients necessary for each?

- **What makes a strong church?** Strength doesn’t necessarily come from the number of members. We often incorrectly assume a large church is a strong church. But that may not be the case at all. God has generally accomplished more with a few than He has with a multitude – like Gideon’s victory over the Midianites and Amalekites with only 300 men (Judges 7), or David’s defeat over the Philistines by slaying Goliath (1 Samuel 14). Therefore, a strong church isn’t necessarily one that is blessed with large numbers.

A strong church is one that relies on the strength of God rather than on its own strength. The apostle Paul understood this principle when he wrote, “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might.” (Ephesians 6:10) “And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:7-10).

- **What makes a working church?** Someone has said, “The church is made up of willing workers. Ten percent are willing to work, and the other ninety percent are willing for them to work!” Therefore, the greatest need of the church today is workers, because the church is a place for work. Among the many great lessons we can learn from the parable of the Laborers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16), is one we often overlook. That lesson is simply that the Lord was actually looking for laborers to send into His vineyard. There was plenty of work to do, and no need for anyone to simply be standing around all day looking for work. This is why the Lord wanted His disciples to see that, “The harvest truly is great, but the laborers are few; therefore pray the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.” (Luke 10:2). Unfortunately, too many Christians judge their devotion to God by what they don’t do – they don’t lie, cheat, steal, etc.. Rather, we should judge our devotion to God by what we do – such as giving of our time and energy “to seek and to save that which is lost.” The potential of many congregations is unlimited if just a few more were truly dedicated to serving the needs of the Lord rather than their own.

The failure of the Jews in Haggai’s day to rebuild the Temple was due to their own laziness and spiritual weakness. There are several reasons for this sad condition that are

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strikingly similar to today. They were more concerned about their own luxury and comfort than they were about building the Lord's house. The people had convinced themselves that it was not the appropriate time to build the Lord's house. But through the prophet Haggai, the Lord said, "Is it time for you yourselves to dwell in your paneled houses, and this temple to lie in ruins? Now therefore," thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways! You have sown much, and bring in little; You eat, but do not have enough; You drink, but you are not filled with drink; You clothe yourselves, but no one is warm; And he who earns wages, Earns wages to put into a bag with holes." Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Consider your ways!" (Haggai 1:4-7). These people had become preoccupied with building their own paneled houses while the Lord's house lay in ruins. They were also preoccupied with sowing, eating, drinking, clothing, and earning wages – none of which brought any lasting satisfaction. Times haven't changed. We also become too preoccupied with things that are only transitory in nature – all the things that the Lord promised He would provide us if we would only "seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness" (Matthew 6:24-33).

They had become complacent with doing just enough to get by. Through the prophet Haggai, the Lord asked this question: "Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory? And how do you see it now? In comparison with it, is this not in your eyes as nothing?" (Haggai 2:3). The Lord wanted them to remember the former glory of the grand Temple of Solomon, and compare that with what lay before them now – a Temple not even half complete, and which still lay in ruins. Perhaps they were thinking they had already accomplished quite a lot in simply laying the foundation. But so much more needed to be done. A foundation is one thing, but the Temple is something else. We have also become complacent in thinking we have made great strides for the cause of Christ simply because we come together to worship regularly, uphold sound doctrine, and open our doors to any who wishes to come in. But in reality, we have done precious little to build. Faithfulness to the Lord is important, but our duty as a Christian extends well beyond the foundation of our own faithfulness. We need to be busy building faithfulness in the lives of others – first laying a foundation of faith in Jesus Christ, then building on it.

But just as the Lord gave the people of Jerusalem encouragement to proceed with building His house, the Lord gives us the same encouragement today. The Lord's encouraging promise was simple and direct – "I am with you." (Haggai 2:4). When Jesus issued the Great Commission prior to His ascension into heaven, He made the same promise. "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:19-20). The Lord promises His presence and His power. That alone should be enough to silence all our fears. There is simply no task or work the Lord requires of us but that He doesn't also promise to be with us all the way.

Motivated by the encouraging words of the prophet Haggai, the people of Jerusalem set about to complete the task of rebuilding the house of God. Because of their zeal and renewed dedication, the Lord gave one additional promise: "The glory of this latter temple

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shall be greater than the former,' says the LORD of hosts. 'And in this place I will give peace,' says the LORD of hosts." (Haggai 2:9). The Lord will always bless the efforts of those who sincerely seek to do His will. He gives us the promises of His strength and of His presence. What more could we ask? Now all that remains is for us to "Be strong... and work!"



*"Now may the God of peace  
who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead,  
that great Shepherd of the sheep,  
through the blood of the everlasting covenant,  
make you complete in every good work to do His will,  
working in you what is well pleasing in His sight,  
through Jesus Christ,  
to whom be glory forever and ever.  
Amen."*

– Hebrews 13:20-21

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**Appendix**  
**Charts and Outlines**

# The Inspired Word of God

## Two Types of Revelation

- Natural (Ps. 19:1-4; Rom. 1:20)
- Supernatural (Eph. 3:3-5; 1 Pet. 1:10-12)

## Word of God Verbally Inspired

- 2 Tim. 3:16-17 - Inspiration ("God Breathed") Old Testament claims inspiration 2,600 times
- 2 Pet. 1:16-21 - Did not originate with apostles, but apostles spoke as they were "moved" (inspired) by Holy Spirit
- 1 Cor. 2:13 - Not man's wisdom, but Holy Spirit's
- 1 John 1:1-4 - Word confirmed by apostles who "have heard... seen... and handled"
- Deut. 4:2; Rev. 22:18-19 - Must not add to or take away from
- Jude 3 - Once for all (time) delivered
- Gal. 1:6-12 - Accept no other gospel
- John 8:32 - Truth can be known

## Evidence of Divine Authorship

- Contains 66 books written by 40 authors from every walk of life, written over 1600 years (60 generations), covering hundreds of controversial topics, yet perfect unity with no contradictions (Try that with only 10 writers today)
- Fulfilled prophecies (about Christ, the church, destruction of ancient kingdoms, etc.)

## Bible is Reliable

- More than 14,000 manuscript copies, some dating back to A.D. 130 (oldest complete manuscript A.D. 325)
- Entire New Testament can be reproduced from quotes of Christian writers (A.D. 100 to 200)

**We Will Be Judged By The Word of God (John 12:48)**

# Comparison of Manuscript Evidence

Author	When Written	Earliest Copy	Time Span	No. of Copies
Caesar	100-44 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,000 Years	10
Plato	427-347 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,200 Years	7
Tacitus	A.D. 100	A.D. 1,000	1,000 Years	20
Pliny	A.D. 61-113	A.D. 850	750 Years	7
Thucydides	460-400 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,300 Years	8
Suetonius	A.D. 75-160	A.D. 950	800 Years	8
Herodotus	480-425 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,300 Years	8
Sophocles	496-406 B.C.	A.D. 1,000	1,400 Years	100
Catullus	54 B.C.	A.D. 1,550	1,600 Years	3
Euripedes	460-406 B.C.	A.D. 1,100	1,500 Years	9
Demosthenes	383-322 B.C.	A.D. 1,100	1,300 Years	200
Aristotle	384-322 B.C.	A.D. 1,100	1,400 Years	5
Aristophanes	450-385 B.C.	A.D. 900	1,200 Years	10
New Testament	A.D. 45-96	A.D. 130 *	40 Years	14,000

\* The John Ryland manuscripts (in the Ryland Museum in London, England), contain portions of the gospel of John and date back to A.D. 130, approximately 40 to 45 years after the original manuscript was written around A.D. 85.

# Reliability of the Old Testament

There are few ancient manuscript copies of the Old Testament. When copies of the Hebrew text were made, the Jews would ceremonially destroy the old, worn out manuscript.

However, the manuscript copies we have today of the Hebrew text of the Old Testament are extremely accurate. The oldest complete Hebrew manuscript of the Old Testament dates back to only A.D. 900, which leaves a gap of approximately 1,300 years between the time when the Old Testament was completed in 400 B.C. with the writing of Malachi. But with the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls, (dating to around 125 B.C.) we have been given dramatic proof of the accuracy of the Old Testament manuscript copies.

The Dead Sea Scrolls were found in a cave in Palestine in 1947 by a Bedouin shepherd boy. The Scrolls were found preserved in a number of clay pots that had been hidden in the cave for safekeeping by the Jews who lived in the nearby community at Qumran which was destroyed by the Romans around A.D. 70. The Scrolls themselves were much older, and were written approximately 125 years before Christ.

Among other things, the Dead Sea Scrolls contain portions of the book of Isaiah, particularly chapter 53. It has been said that of the 166 words in Isaiah 53, only seventeen letters are in question. Ten of these letters are simply a matter of spelling, which does not affect the meaning. Four more letters are minor stylistic changes, such as conjunctions. The remaining three letters comprise the word "light," which is added in verse 11, and does not affect the meaning greatly. Furthermore, the word "light" is found in the Septuagint version of Isaiah 53 (the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures made between 285-246 B.C.). Therefore, in Isaiah chapter 53, of the 166 words in that chapter, there is only one word consisting of three letters which

is in question between the Dead Sea Scrolls (125 B.C.) and the oldest existing Hebrew manuscript (A.D. 900). That amounts to a question over one word after approximately 1,300 years of copying the text hundreds of times.

The Septuagint translation of the Old Testament from Hebrew to Greek, which was done between 285-246 B.C., also provides excellent evidence concerning the reliability of the Old Testament Scriptures. The word "Septuagint" means "seventy" and is designated by the Roman numerals LXX (70), since there were 70 Jewish scholars involved in translating the Hebrew Scriptures into Greek. This translation is very close to the oldest known Hebrew manuscript (The Massoretic Text A.D. 916), proving that after 1,300 years, the Hebrew Massoretic Text is a highly accurate and dependable copy.

Jewish scribes such as the Talmudists (A.D. 100-500) and the Massorettes (A.D. 500-900) took special care to copy every manuscript accurately. Among their rules for copying manuscripts, they could not copy a single word or letter from memory, but had to copy each letter and every "jot and tittle" by first looking at the letter in the existing manuscript, then writing it in the new copy exactly as it appears in the existing manuscript. To safeguard against scribal slips, they counted the number of times each letter of the alphabet occurs in each book, and compared that to the new copy. If there was a discrepancy, they would destroy the new copy and start over again. They also calculated the middle letter of the Pentateuch and the middle letter of the entire Hebrew Bible, if there was a discrepancy with the new copy, it was likewise destroyed and they would begin again. When everything added up with the old manuscript, the new copy was held to be an exact duplicate, and the old manuscript was destroyed.

# Three Dispensations of Time

**Patriarchal**  
2500 Years  
Spoken Law Given to Patriarchs

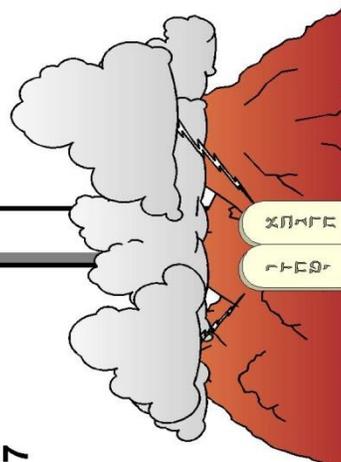
- Adam
- Noah
- Abraham
- Isaac
- Jacob (Israel)
- Moses
- Israelites in Egyptian Bondage 430 Years
- Moses Delivers
- Law Given at Sinai
  - Exodus 20:1-17
  - Deut. 4:10-13
  - Deut. 5:1-3

**Mosaical**  
1500 Years  
Law of Moses for Jews Only

- 15 Judges
  - 3 Kings (Saul, David, Solomon)
  - Divided Kingdom (Judah & Israel)
  - 16 Prophets
- Prophecies of a New Kingdom and a New Covenant to Come  
(Isa. 2:2; Dan. 2:31-44; Jer. 31:31)

**Christian**  
2000 Years  
Law of Christ for All

- Church Established (Acts 2)
- Church Spread (Acts 8)
- Jews & Gentiles (Acts 10 and 11)
- Church/Kingdom (Col. 1:13-14)
- New Covenant with New High Priest (Heb. 8:7-13; 9:11-15; 10:1-18)
- Will End With 2nd Coming  
(1 Thes. 4:13-18; 2 Pet. 3:10-13; Matt. 7:21-23)



Law of Moses Ends  
(Col. 2:14-17)  
Law a Schoolmaster  
(Gal. 3:23-25)

Law of Christ Begins  
Second Covenant—Law of Christ

**Ten Commandments**  
First Covenant - Law of Moses

**The Life of Christ**  
Matthew, Mark, Luke, John

**Genesis**

**Exodus - Malachi**

**Acts - Revelation**

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# Three Dispensations of Time

**INTRODUCTION:** The Bible covers three periods of time (or dispensations of time) that reflect three different ways God gave His law to the people. The first was through the Patriarchs, or heads of the families. The second was through Moses, and was a law given only to the Jews. And the third was through Jesus Christ, which is a law for all mankind. We are living in the final period of time (or dispensation) that we call The Christian Dispensation. It will end when Jesus Christ returns at His second coming.

## I. The Patriarchal Dispensation.

### A. The Creation of the World.

1. In the first two verses of the book of Genesis, we have the three persons of the godhead mentioned in the Hebrew word “Elohim” – which is “God” in the plural sense (God the Father, God the Son – Jesus Christ, and God the Holy Spirit).
2. God created everything in the proper order – first creating that which sustains life before creating life.
  - a. In the process of creation God made it possible for everything to reproduce after its own kind. This creation was followed by procreation.

### B. The Creation of Man.

1. God said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (Genesis 1:26). The “US” of Genesis 1:26 is referring to the other members of the godhead and not angels, because God created man in His OWN image (Genesis 1:27).
  - a. Man is a being of three parts – body, soul and spirit. Man is also a thinking, reasoning creation, and is destined to live for eternity somewhere, either with God or separated from Him.
2. When God created Adam and Eve, He gave them a simple law to follow. They could eat of every tree in the Garden of Eden except one – the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil (Genesis 2:16-17). The day they ate of that tree they would die (be separated from God by sin).
  - a. Sadly, they disobeyed God and were cast out of the garden of Eden, and denied right to the “Tree of Life” by which they could live forever (Genesis 3:1-24).
3. Among the children Adam and Eve had, were Cain and Able (Genesis 4:1-15). Cain was a farmer while his brother Able was a shepherd. Both offered sacrifices to God, but only one sacrifice was acceptable – the sacrifice that required the shedding of blood.
  - a. Able offered his sacrifice “by faith” (Hebrews 11:4). Since faith comes by hearing God’s Word (Romans 10:17), God obviously told what kind of sacrifice He wanted. Abel obeyed, Cain made a substitute as seemed reasonable to him – but he was wrong (cf. Romans 10:1-3). God doesn’t

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allow substitutes for what He commands, no matter how reasonable it may seem to us.

C. The Flood (Approximately 1656 years after Adam and Eve).

1. The earth was filled with wickedness, and God was compelled to destroy the earth (Genesis 6:5-7). However, Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord (Genesis 6:8).
  - a. God commanded the building of a great ark (Genesis 6:14-22), and was very specific about the materials to be used, the dimensions and the layout. If Noah had disregarded God's very specific instructions, do you suppose the ark would have survived the flood? Hardly! Noah did everything exactly as God commanded (Genesis 6:22), and so must we. It took him 120 years to complete the ark.
  - b. Only Noah, his wife, their three sons and their three daughters-in-law (8 people), and the animals taken into the ark were saved from the flood. They had to be in God's ark to be saved, just as we need to be in Christ's church today to be saved.

D. Abraham (Approximately 500 years after the Flood).

1. With the call of Abraham, God begins to fulfill His plan to bring a Savior into the world. Therefore, God told Abram (whose name would later be changed) to leave his homeland and go to a land God would show him. Once there, God would begin to fulfill His promise by making of Abraham a great nation – the Jewish nation, through whom the Messiah would eventually come (See: Genesis 12:1-3; 15:13-18).
2. Abraham becomes the father of Isaac, who then becomes the father of Jacob, whose name is later changed to Israel. Jacob, in turn, has sons whose children become the twelve tribes of Israel – and the beginning of the Jewish nation.
3. Eventually, the entire family moved to Egypt during the time of a severe famine, and prospered there until they became so large that the Egyptians feared them, and subsequently forced them into slavery. For 400 years, the children of Israel were in bondage to the Egyptians, and, according to some estimates, grew to around 2-3 million people.

E. Moses (Approximately 1,500 years before Christ).

1. God heard the cries of His people and raised up a deliverer named Moses. Through the power of God, Moses brought about the deliverance of the people, who left the land of Egypt and fled through the Red Sea until they arrived at Mount Sinai, where God through Moses delivered His Law to the children of Israel.
  - a. This Law, or Covenant (contract), was contained in what we know as The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 4:10-13).
  - b. It was given only to the Children of Israel (the Jews) who were present on that occasion (Deuteronomy 5:1-3).
2. The giving of the Law of Moses to the children of Israel brought in the second dispensation of time, the Mosaical Dispensation.

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## II. The Mosaical Dispensation.

- A. The Judges (15 Judges or Military Leaders in Israel).
  - 1. After the children of Israel finally arrived in the land of Canaan – the same land God had promised to Abraham (Genesis 15:13-18) – the people encountered periods of peace followed by conflict with their neighbors.
  - 2. After the death of Joshua the people had no one to lead them into battle against their enemies, God raised up Judges, as needed, to lead the people of Israel into successful campaigns against their enemies – including one woman, Deborah. The period of the Judges lasted for just over 300 years.
- B. 3 Kings (Saul, David and Solomon).
  - 1. Eventually, the people wanted a king to rule them, and God gave them their first king, Saul, who didn't always follow God's commandments (cf. 1 Sam. 15:7-9, 13-15, 23). Saul was took his own life after being defeated in battle, and David became the next king. David was the one through whom God said the Messiah would eventually come. David's son Solomon followed him to the throne, and built the Temple in Jerusalem and expanded the kingdom through heavy taxation.
- C. The Divided Kingdom (Judah and Israel).
  - 1. When Solomon died and his son Rehoboam came to the throne, the Jewish nation of Israel erupted into civil war in 975 B.C. over continued high taxes, and divided into two kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom of Israel (10 tribes under the rule of Jeroboam) and the Southern Kingdom of Judah (2 tribes under the rule of Rehoboam). Israel has 19 kings in 9 Dynasties, while Judah had only 12 kings in 1 Dynasty.
  - 2. This division continued from 975 B.C. until the Assyrian captivity in 721 B.C. – over 250 years. Afterward, Judah stood alone from 722 B.C. until the Babylonian captivity and takeover of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. – lasting approximately 135 years longer than her northern counterpart, while also being ruled by her last 7 kings.
- D. 16 Prophets.
  - 1. Although both kingdoms were frequently led by wicked kings, the Northern Kingdom of Israel was more wicked. During this time, God raised up a number of prophets who spoke to the political and religious leaders of both kingdoms in an effort to get them to repent, and to warn them of the consequences they would suffer if they didn't. The “literary” prophets who came out of the Northern Kingdom of Israel were Jonah, Isaiah, Joel, Amos, Hosea, Micah. The “literary” prophets who came from the Southern Kingdom of Judah were Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Obadiah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Zephaniah.
  - 2. Many of these prophets (such as Isaiah, Jeremiah and others) also prophesied of the coming of the Messiah, and the spiritual kingdom He would establish in the last days (the last dispensation of time).
- E. The Captivity 70 Years and Return.
  - 1. Finally, in 721 B.C. God allowed the Assyrians to take the Northern Kingdom of Israel away into captivity. The Southern Kingdom of Judah eventually became as wicked as their northern counterpart, and was also allowed to be taken away into

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- captivity by the Babylonians in 586 B.C. (the Babylonians had also conquered the Assyrians).
2. After 70 years in exile, God providentially allowed as many of the captive Jews (from all 12 tribes) who wished to do so to return to their homeland to rebuilt the city of Jerusalem and the Temple – both of which had been destroyed. During this time the events recorded in books of Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, take place, and the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi give their prophecies.
- F. Prophecies of a New Kingdom and a New Covenant to Come.
1. As stated earlier, many of the prophets whom God raised up spoke of a new Messianic kingdom that would someday be established, as well as a new covenant (contract) that God would make with His people.
    - a. Isaiah 2:2-3 – The events would happen “in the latter days” (“last days” KJV), when God would establish a “mountain of the Lord’s house” that “all nations” would come to, and the Law would go forth from Zion (one of the mountains on which Jerusalem is built – the “Temple Mount”), and the Word of the Lord would go forth from Jerusalem.
    - b. Daniel 2:31-44 – Daniel interprets Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (the king of the Babylonian Empire), which speaks of a great image made of four metals – a head of gold, arms and chest of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and legs and feet of iron (the iron of the feet were mixed with clay). These represent four empires – Babylonian Empire, Medo-Persian Empire, Macedonian Empire (Alexander the Great), and the Roman Empire. During the days of the kings of the fourth empire (Roman), God would set up a kingdom that will rule over all the others, would never be destroyed, and would never be conquered (left to another people).
    - c. Jeremiah 31:31-34 – Jeremiah’s prophecy is that God will make a “new covenant” (contract) with Israel and Judah, not like the one He made when He brought them out of Egypt, because they broke that covenant (contract).
- G. The Life of Christ (Recorded in Matthew, Mark, Luke and John).
1. Eventually, God fulfilled His promise to Abraham in the birth of Jesus Christ, who came as the Son of God (the Messiah) to be the One through whom “all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Genesis 12:3).
  2. Jesus was born, lived and died under the Old Testament Law of Moses, but His death on the cross brought an end to that Law (Colossians 2:14-17; also see: Galatians 3:24).
  3. Following His resurrection from the dead and His ascension back into heaven, Jesus delivered a New Covenant through the apostles. This covenant is the Law of Christ that was not just for the Jews, but for Jew and Gentile (non-Jew) alike.
  4. This brought an end to the Mosaical Dispensation, and begins the final period of time known as the Christian Dispensation.
  5. God shaped and molded the course of history to bring His people to the moment in time when salvation through Jesus Christ would be offered to all, and when the church (the spiritual kingdom of promise and prophecy) would be established.

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### III. The Christian Dispensation.

- A. The Church was Established (Acts 2).
  - 1. On the first Pentecost following the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, Peter and the other apostles of Jesus preached the first gospel sermon, proving Jesus was the Son of God, and telling people they can now be saved by being baptized into Jesus Christ for the remission of their sins (Acts 2:38).
  - 2. Those who received his word, were baptized (approximately 3,000 on the first day), and were added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:41, 47).
- B. The Church Spread (Acts 8).
  - 1. The numbers grew from 3,000 on Pentecost (Acts 2:41), to about 5,000 (Acts 4:4), to “multitudes” (Acts 5:14), to multitudes that “multiplied greatly” (Acts 6:7).
  - 2. Not even persecution could keep the church from spreading (Acts 8:1-4). The church first began in Jerusalem (Acts 2), but quickly spread to the northern province of Samaria (Acts 8:5, 12), and beyond.
- C. Jews and Gentiles (Acts 10 and 11).
  - 1. At first, only Jews heard the message that Jesus was the Son of God, but that message soon reached Gentiles as well – the first was a Roman centurion by the name of Cornelius (Acts 10:1-6, 34-48; 11:13-18).
- D. Church/Kingdom (Colossians 1:13-14).
  - 1. The Old Testament prophets repeatedly spoke about the establishment of a Messianic kingdom that would be established in the days of the Roman Empire (Daniel 2:44).
  - 2. Even John the Baptism and Jesus Christ had preached that the kingdom was “at hand” (Matthew 3:1-2; 4:17).
  - 3. Following the establishment of the Lord’s church on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), the apostle Paul wrote to one of those congregations, the church at Colosse, telling them they had been translated into the kingdom (Colossians 1:13-14; also see: Hebrews 12:28; Revelation 1:9). Before the Day of Pentecost, the kingdom was said to be “at hand.” But following the Day of Pentecost, the kingdom was said to be in existence.
- E. New Covenant with New High Priest (Hebrews 8:7-13; 9:11-15; 10:1-18).
  - 1. When God gave a new covenant to His people (spiritual Israel – the church), He also made changes in the priesthood. There would no longer be priests who offered daily sacrifices according to the Old Testament Law of Moses, because Jesus Christ, our High Priest, has offered His body once for all time for the sins of the world.
- F. This Dispensation will end with the 2nd Coming of Christ (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).
  - 1. When Jesus returns, the dead in Christ will rise first, then we who are alive and remain will join them in the air – “and thus we shall always be with the Lord.”
    - a. The Bible doesn’t speak of a supposed 1,000-year reign of Christ on the earth during a millennial kingdom. His kingdom has already been established (the church), and He is reigning at the right hand of God now.
    - b. In fact, when Jesus returns, the heavens, the earth, and all the works in the world, will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:10-13).

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- c. The words Peter uses to describe the destruction of the heavens, the earth, and the works on the earth, indicate complete and total destruction of everything – these words are “pass away,” “melt,” “burned up,” and “dissolved.”
  2. We need to be ready for that day. It’s coming! (Read: Matthew 7:21-23).

# Our Need For A Savior

## The Problem of Sin

- Gen. 1:26-28 (Also see Ezek. 28:15) - God created man and woman sinless (no shame)
- Gen. 2:15-17 - Adam and Eve given simple commands to obey
- Gen. 3:1-6 - The problem of temptation
- Gen. 3:7-24; Isa. 59:2 - Adam and Eve Sinned - Died spiritually (Sin causes separation of fellowship with God)
- Gen. 3:15 (Also see Isa. 53) - God promises a solution
- Gen. 3:22-24 - Adam and Eve lost right to the Tree of Life
- Gen. 4:1-7 - God initiated system of sacrifices for sins that required shedding of blood (to remind us that we should be the one dying for our sins)

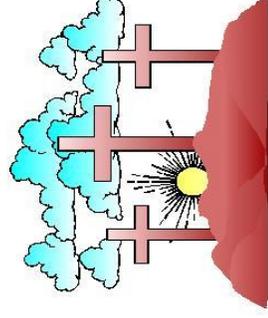
## God's Remedy for Sin

- Rom. 3:9-23 - No one is righteous, all have sinned
- Ezek. 18:19-22; Jas. 1:13-15 - We do not inherit sin from our forefathers, but are responsible for our own actions
- Rom. 6:23 - Wages of sin is death (eternal separation from God)
- 2 Pet. 3:9 - God does not want to see us perish
- Gal. 4:4-7 - God sent Jesus to redeem us
- John 3:16; Rom. 5:6-11 - God's love is demonstrated in the sacrifice of His Son
- Heb. 10:1-25 (Also see John 15:12-14) - Jesus laid down His life once for all time as the greatest sacrifice for our sins

## God's Remedy Applied

- Acts 2:22-39 - Peter's sermon on Pentecost
- Acts 8:26-39 - Conversion of Ethiopian eunuch
- Acts 9:10-18 - Conversion of Saul
- Acts 10:34-48 - Conversion of Cornelius' household
- Acts 16:25-34 - Conversion of Philippian jailer
- Rev. 2:7; 22:1-2, 14 - Tree of Life lost in Eden, regained in Heaven

**Hear, Believe, Repent, Confess, Baptized for Remission of Sins**



# Examples of Conversion

Matthew 28:18-20

Preaching	Believed	Repented	Confessed	Baptized	Saved
Pentecost (Acts 2:14-47)	Cut to Heart (v. 37)	Repent (vs. 37-38)		Baptized (vs. 38-41)	Remission of Sins (vs. 38-47)
Samaria (Acts 8:5-13)	Believed (v. 12)			Baptized (vs. 12-13)	
Eunuch (Acts 8:26-39)	Believed (vs. 36-37)		Confessed (v. 37)	Baptized (v. 38)	Rejoiced (v. 39)
Saul (Acts 9:1-18)	Fasted and Prayed (vs. 9-11)	Fasted and Prayed (vs. 9-11)		Baptized (v. 18)	Sins Washed Away (22:16)
Cornelius (Acts 10:34-48)	Believed (v. 43)			Baptized (v. 48)	Remission of Sins (v. 43)
Lydia (Acts 16:14-15)	Believed (v. 14)			Baptized (v. 15)	
Philippian Jailer (Acts 16:25-34)	Believed (v. 31)			Baptized (v. 33)	Rejoiced (v. 34)
Preaching Rom. 10:11-17	Faith Heb. 11:6	Repentance Luke 13:3	Confession Matt. 10:32 Rom. 10:10	Baptism Rom. 6:4 1 Pet. 3:21	Salvation Acts 4:12 2 Tim. 2:10

# Searching for The New Testament Church

## Prophecies in Old Testament

- Isaiah 2:2-4 - ("in the last days," "all nations shall flow to it," "word of the Lord from Jerusalem").
- Daniel 2:31-45 (esp. v. 44) - ("in the days of these kings (4th empire - Roman Empire)," "shall never be destroyed," "shall stand forever.")

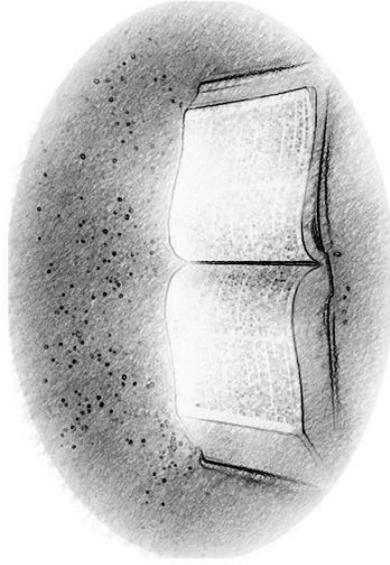
## Kingdom "At Hand" During Life of Jesus

- Matt. 3:1-3 - John preached "kingdom of heaven is at hand."
- Matt. 4:17, 23 - Jesus preached "kingdom of heaven is at hand," and the "gospel of the kingdom."
- Mark 9:1 - Some living would "see kingdom come with power."
- Matt. 16:13-19 - Built by Jesus, gates of hades shall not prevail against it.
- John 18:36 - Not of this world (not earthly kingdom).
- Luke 17:20-21 - Kingdom within us, where Christ reigns.
- Acts 1:4-8 - Apostles told to wait for the coming of the kingdom in Jerusalem until they "receive power" when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. (The kingdom would come with power - the power would come with the Holy Spirit - the Holy Spirit came on Pentecost.)

## Kingdom (Church) Established

- Acts 2:1-47 - Apostles proclaimed a resurrected Christ, who is seated on His throne in heaven — those who were baptized into Christ were added to church (also see Gal. 3:26-27).
- Col. 1:9-14 - We are translated into the kingdom where we have redemption and forgiveness of sins (also see Heb. 12:28; Rev. 1:9).

- Rom. 16:16 - called churches of Christ; 1 Cor. 1:1-2 church of God (God the Son); Heb. 12:22-23 – church of the firstborn; 1 Cor. 12:27 – body of Christ.
- Acts 11:26; 1 Pet. 4:16 - members called disciples, Christians.



## Identifying the Local Church

- Scriptural Organization - Phil. 1:1-2; 1 Tim. 3:1-13; Titus 1:5-9; 1 Pet. 5:1-3; Acts 20:28 - Elders (also called *Bishops or Pastors*), Deacons and Members.
- Scriptural Lord's Supper - Matt. 26:26-30; 1 Cor. 11:23-29; Acts 20:7 - Fruit of vine & Unleavened bread, taken every first day of the week.
- Scriptural Giving - 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 9:6-7 - First day of every week, as God has prospered us.
- Scriptural Music - Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16 - Singing, making melody in the heart.

# Churches (Denominations) Today

## (No Biblical Authority for Teachings or Practices)

### Names

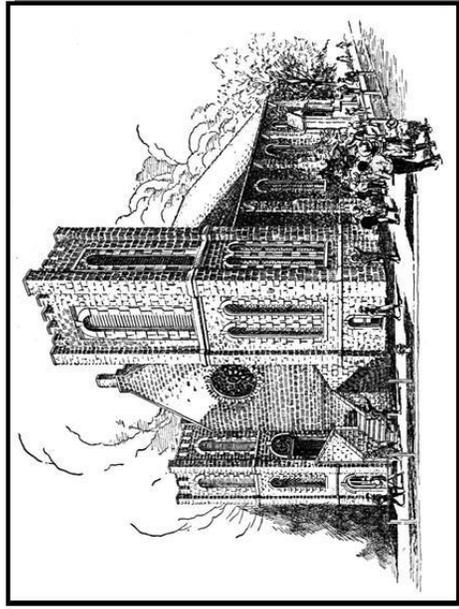
- Baptist
- Methodist
- Presbyterian
- Catholic
- Episcopal
- Lutheran
- Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints (Mormon)
- Seventh Day Adventist
- Jehovah's Witnesses

### Organization

- Unqualified Elders and Deacons
- Deaconness
- Pope and Cardinals (Followed by Bishops and Priests)
- Clergy vs. Laity (Sometimes celibacy required of clergy)
- Gay and Lesbian Clergy
- Women Preachers
- Earthly Headquarters
- Pastor

### Music

- Instrumental Music
- Special Choirs



### Giving

- Tithing (Tenth)
- Not Weekly
- For Man-made Organizations

### Lord's Supper

- Monthly
- Quarterly
- Twice a Year, or Once a Year
- Thursday Night
- Bread Only
- Only Priest Partake of Fruit of Vine

### Baptism

- Sprinkling or Pouring
- Infant Baptism
- Not for Remission of Sins
- Holy Spirit Baptism

### Eternity

- No Hell (Hell on Earth) or Hell Temporary
- Purgatory or Baptism for Dead
- Degrees of Heaven
- Degrees of Hell (Levels of Punishment)
- Not Until After 1,000 Year Reign of Christ on Earth

# The Empty Tomb

## Examining the Death, Burial and Resurrection of Jesus

### Romans 1:1-3

#### Jesus Died

- Scourged before Crucifixion
- Physically Exhausted
- Crucifixion Most Cruel Form of Death
- Jesus' Side Pierced (Blood and Water)

#### Jesus Buried

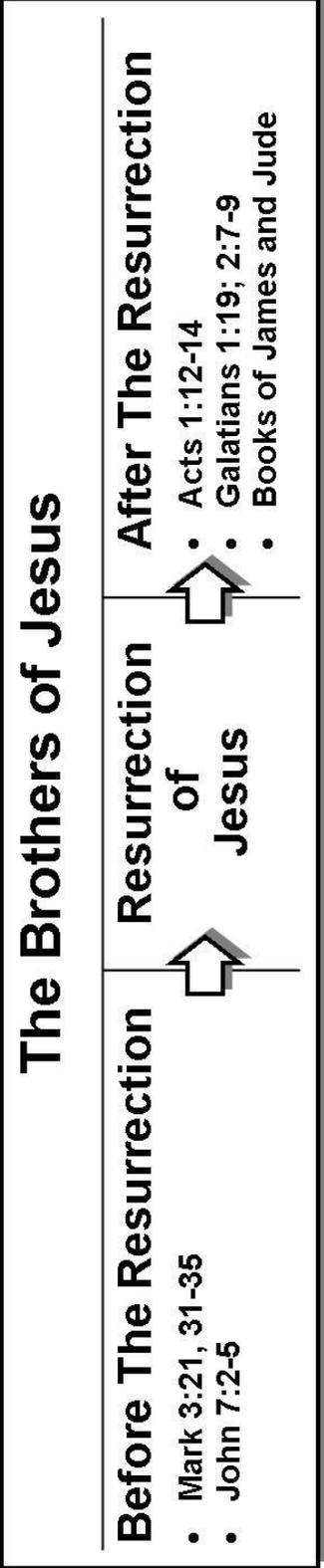
- Body Prepared while Women Observed
- Tomb Solid Rock
- Stone Door (1 1/2 - 2 Tons)
- Guard Secures and Seals Tomb

#### Jesus Resurrected

- Tomb Empty
- Stone Moved "Away"
- Grave Clothes
- Post-Resurrection Appearances

## Empty Tomb Theories

The Wrong Tomb Theory      The Swoon Theory      The Hallucination Theory      The Theft Theory



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# The Empty Tomb

**INTRODUCTION:** In his introductory remarks to the readers of his letter to the Romans, the apostle Paul affirmed that Jesus was declared to be the “Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead” (Romans 1:1-4). If Jesus was not resurrected from the dead, Christianity is a vain religion. Paul also wrote, “if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty” (1 Corinthians 15:14). However, if He was raised, then God exists, and Jesus is the Son of God as He claimed. Let’s examine the evidence that supports the belief that Jesus was raised from the dead and is “declared to be the Son of God with power according to the Spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead.”

## I. Jesus Died.

A. Scourged before Crucifixion (Mark 15:15-20).

1. The Jews limited scourging to 40 lashes, but the Romans set no limits. The victim was at the mercy of the Roman scourger.
2. The scourge was made with long leather strips into which sharp pieces of metal and bone were tied. It was designed to strip away the flesh and lay bare the victim’s muscles and bones. Some victims died under the scourge.

B. Physically Exhausted.

1. The phrase “and they brought Him to Golgotha” (Mark 15:22), literally means they carried Jesus to the place of execution.
2. He was so physically exhausted that He could not make the last steps up Calvary under His own power. They had to carry Jesus the remainder of the way.

C. Crucifixion was the Most Cruel Form of Death.

1. Crucifixion was the most terrible form of execution imaginable and was designed to make the victim linger in unimaginable pain.

D. Jesus’ Side was Pierced (Blood and Water).

1. Pilate was surprised to find that Jesus died so soon (Mark 15:44).
2. But the death of Jesus was assured when a soldier pierced His side (John 19:34-35).
  - a. If Jesus were not already dead, the he spear that was thrust into the chest cavity of Jesus would have immediately killed Him.
  - b. The blood and water confirmed that Jesus died, common to all victims of crucifixion, of a ruptured heart. Death by crucifixion caused the lungs to fill with blood and the heart to rupture. The fact that both blood and water came forth from the wound is conclusive proof that Jesus was already dead.

## II. Jesus Buried.

A. Body Prepared, while Women Observed (Matthew 27:59-61; Mark 15:46-47; John 19:38-40; Luke 23:53).

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1. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus prepared the body by wrapping it mummy-style (“bound”, literally “wound,” John 19:40) in linen wrappings saturated in 100 lbs. of myrrh and aloes.
  2. The women were sitting opposite the tomb and took special notice of the grave’s location.
    - a. These women included Mary the mother of Jesus (also the mother of James and Joses), Mary Magdalene (Matthew 27:61; Mark 15:47), and probably Salome, the mother of Zebedee’s children (Matthew 27:55-56; Luke 23:55).
    - b. They would be coming back after the Sabbath was over to complete the task Joseph and Nicodemus were unable to complete before the Sabbath began.
- B. The Tomb Solid Rock (Mark 15:46).
1. The tomb was cut out of solid rock (a cave-like tomb), and was a new tomb in which no one had been buried before (Matthew 27:59-60; Luke 23:53).
- C. The Stone (Matthew 27:60; Mark 16:4).
1. According to archeologists, the opening to tombs like the one in which Jesus was buried were secured by a large, disc-shaped stone, which rolled close in a groove that was slightly depressed at the center of the opening.
  2. These stones were estimated to be 1<sup>1</sup>/<sub>2</sub> to 2 tons in weight and required several men to move. Matthew says the stone was a “large” stone, while Mark says the stone was “very large.” Tombs were designed to be closed, and never opened again.
- D. Guard Secures and Seals Tomb (Matthew 27:62-66).
1. The following day (the Sabbath), the chief priests and the Pharisees went to Pilate to ask that the tomb be made secure, fearing the disciples might attempt to steal the body and claim Jesus had been resurrected.
  2. Several important facts are revealed here.
    - a. Pilate granted their request for a guard – but was it the Jewish Temple guard, or Roman guards?
      - (1). The word “guard” is from the Greek “kustodia” which seems to indicate a Roman Guard (according to Greek scholars A.T. Robertson, Arndt and Gingrich, and others).
      - (2). Jewish Temple guards would have no jurisdiction outside of the Temple grounds, and it seems unlikely that Pilate would have granted them such authority.
    - b. The guard “made the tomb secure.”
      - (1). The guard had been posted to keep the disciples of Jesus from stealing the body – but what if the body had already been stolen the night before (between sunset Friday and sunrise Saturday)?
      - (2). Upon posting a guard at the tomb, the guard would have naturally removed the stone to examine the tomb’s contents – making sure a body was still there and that they were not guarding an empty tomb. They just needed to make certain the body (whoever it was) was still there in three days.
    - c. The guard sealed the stone, or attached a seal to the stone covering the tomb.

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- (1). Anything sealed in this manner would become the property of Rome and any attempt to vandalize the tomb would incur the full wrath of Roman law.
  - d. The guard “set a watch.”
    - (1). The number of men comprising a Roman “guard” was generally four men, one of whom would act as sentinel, while the others rested nearby, ready to immediately respond at the first sound of alarm.
    - (2). At no time were guards on sentinel duty allowed to sleep or to even sit down. Any guard caught sleeping while on duty was immediately executed along with the other guards in the detachment who allowed him to sleep.

### **III. Jesus Resurrected (Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:1-8; Luke 24:1-12).**

#### **A. Tomb Empty (John 20:1-10).**

1. There is no question, even from a historical perspective, that the tomb of Jesus was empty on the Sunday morning following His crucifixion and burial. If the tomb was not empty:
  - a. There would have been no need for some of the guard to seek the intervention of the Jewish authorities to protect them from Roman military justice (Matthew 28:11).
  - b. There would have been no need for Jewish authorities to bribe the soldiers to say the body of Jesus had been stolen (Matthew 28:12-15).
  - c. It would have been a simple matter for the enemies of Jesus to open the tomb and produce the body as evidence.

#### **B. Stone Moved “Away.”**

1. The Greek words used to describe the stone’s location in relationship to the tomb are very significant.
  - a. Matthew uses the word “kuilo,” meaning, “to roll” (Matthew 27:60; 28:2).
  - b. Mark uses the same root word “kuilo,” but adds the preposition “ana,” meaning “up” or “upward” (Mark 16:3-4).
    - (1). This signifies that there was a slope or incline down which the stone was originally rolled into place. Therefore, to open the tomb, the stone had to be rolled “up” an incline.
  - c. Luke uses “kulio,” but adds a different preposition “apo,” meaning “away from” or “separated by distance” (Luke 24:1-2).
    - (1). This adds a significant detail. Not only was the stone rolled “up” away from the entrance, it was separated from the entrance by some distance.
  - d. But John offers the most significant evidence of all in his use of the preposition “airo,” meaning, “to pick up and carry away” (John 20:1).
    - (1). This shows that the stone was not merely rolled up away from the entrance a short distance, but appeared as if someone had actually picked it up and carried it completely away from the entrance of the tomb.
    - (2). It would be the equivalent of robbers removing a bank vault door and carrying it out to the parking lot, just to steal the money in the vault!

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C. The Grave Clothes (John 20:3-8).

1. While Luke's account mentions the grave clothes were seen by Peter laying by themselves (Luke 24:12), John's account reveals details not mentioned elsewhere about the position of the grave clothes.
  - a. When Peter and John entered the tomb, they both took note as to the way the linen grave clothes were found.
    - (1). The grave clothes were seen "lying" (Greek "keimena," literally "collapsed") where the body of Jesus had once lain (John 20:5-6). This would seem to indicate that the mummy-style wrappings that had surrounded the body of Jesus were exactly where the body had been placed, only the body had vanished, and the clothes had collapsed under the weight of approximately 100 lbs. of spices. There had been no effort to unwrap the grave clothes by any would-be thief.
    - (2). The napkin, which had been wrapped around the head of Jesus, was not found with the rest of the linen grave clothes, but was found by itself some distance away and neatly rolled up (John 20:7). A.T. Robertson says, "It was arranged in an ordinary fashion. There was no haste." (A.T. Robertson, "Word Pictures in the New Testament, Vol. 5).

D. Post-Resurrection Appearances.

1. Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene (John 20:14; Mark 16:9), to the women at the tomb (Matthew 28:9-10), to Peter (Luke 24:34; 1 Corinthians 15:5), to the Emmaus disciples (Luke 24:13-33), to the apostles without Thomas (Luke 24:36-43; John 20:19-24), to the apostles with Thomas (John 20:26-29), to the seven by the Lake of Tiberias (John 21:1-23), to 500 at once (1 Corinthians 15:6), to James (1 Corinthians 15:7), to the eleven at the ascension (Matthew 28:16-20; Mark 16:14-20; Luke 24:33-52; Acts 1:3-12), to Stephen (Acts 7:55), to Paul on the way to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6; 1 Corinthians 15:8), to Paul in the Temple (Acts 22:17-21; 23:11), and to John on Patmos (Revelation 1:10-19).
2. These men and women gave the world the highest ethical teachings the world has ever known, and they were willing to die for their faith in what they had seen.
3. Perhaps the most telling fact is that the Jewish leaders (the enemies of Jesus) were silent when Peter proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus at Pentecost (Acts 2).

#### **IV. Theories to Explain the Empty Tomb.**

A. The Wrong Tomb Theory.

1. Argument: This argues that the women, and subsequently everyone else, went to the wrong tomb. It assumes that the women observed the burial of Jesus from a distance, and upon going to the wrong tomb, automatically assumed Jesus had been resurrected.
2. Reply: The women took special notice of the tomb's location because they planned to return on the day following the Sabbath (72 hours later) to complete the preparation for burial (Matthew 27:61; Mark 15:47; Luke 23:55). Peter and John went to the tomb (John 20:2-8). They obviously knew the tomb's location. Would Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus forget the tomb's location? Would

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the soldiers have guarded the wrong tomb? The body in the tomb they guarded was gone on Sunday morning. Did the angel go to the wrong tomb (Matthew 28:6; Mark 16:5-6; Luke 24:1-9)? If everyone went to the wrong tomb, why didn't the Jewish religious leaders end the rumors of a resurrection by simply going to the right tomb and producing the body?

B. The Swoon Theory.

1. Argument: This theory says Jesus never died, but simply fainted on the cross and regained consciousness in the cool tomb and escaped. Since medical knowledge was not very good in those days, it appeared that Jesus had died, but He was actually taken down from the cross still alive.
2. Reply: While it is true that some victims of crucifixion were given reprieves and removed from the cross, few ever recovered, even with immediate and intense medical treatment. Jesus endured more than the average crucifixion victim. He had not slept since Wednesday night, endured the stress of appearing before two courts of law (one Jewish, and one Roman), he was beaten and scourged, and he was led to be crucified, carrying his own cross until He collapsed at one point unable to go any further. He had to be "carried" the final way. He did not accept the wine mingled with myrrh to help deaden His pain (Mark 15:23), and finally, when He died, a soldier pierced His side with a spear bringing forth blood and water – a wound that punctured the lung and heart. If He were not dead, He fooled everyone from the guard to those who prepared Him for burial. How could anyone who had suffered what Jesus endured unwrap Himself from grave clothes wrapped around Him mummy-style and saturated in 100 lbs. of spices, roll back a 1<sup>1/2</sup> to 2 ton stone, fight off a Roman guard of 4 heavily armed men, walk the length of Palestine and appear before His disciples in Galilee whole and hearty? For Jesus to do this, He would have to be SUPERNATURAL!

C. The Hallucination Theory.

1. Argument: This theory says the appearances of Jesus after His burial, were not actual appearances but merely hallucinations of overly zealous believers. The followers of Jesus did not want to believe all had failed, and in their zeal, imagined visitations from their slain leader.
2. Reply: Hallucinations are only found among people who meet certain criteria. They are generally high-strung and very nervous, highly imaginative, or persons who have a hopeful expectation of seeing a vision, or who are anticipating one. While the disciples were nervous, hiding for fear of being found (John 20:19), they were not characterized as being high-strung, overly imaginative, and certainly were not anticipating seeing the risen Christ. When the women told the apostles they had seen the risen Savior, the apostles dismissed these stories as "idle tales, and did not believe them" (Luke 24:10-11). The initial reaction of the disciples to the empty tomb was not that Jesus had been raised, but that someone had removed the body (John 20:11-14). It's also unlikely that 500 people would see the same hallucination at the same time (1 Corinthians 15:6). Also, most hallucinations don't generally ask for something to eat (Luke 24:41-43). But perhaps the most damaging evidence to this theory is that men and women

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“touched” Jesus (Matthew 28:9; Luke 24:39; John 20:26-29). You can’t touch a hallucination.

**D. The Theft Theory**

1. Argument: This theory says that either the disciples stole the body of Jesus, claiming He had been resurrected from the dead, or the Jews or Romans removed the body for safekeeping.
2. Reply: The disciples were hardly the kind of men who would attempt to steal the body of Jesus from under the noses of the Roman guards. They had cowardly forsaken Jesus and fled for their own safety when He was arrested. Peter followed at a distance, but denied knowing the Lord three times. Furthermore, the guards would have never allowed someone to steal the body under penalty of death – this is why they sought the protection of the Jewish authorities from Pilate. The physical evidence at the tomb doesn’t suggest a theft either. The 1<sup>1/2</sup> to 2 ton stone was not simply rolled away, it appeared to have been picked up and carried away, from the entrance of the tomb. Why would anyone do that, and how could anyone do that without being detected? And why would they leave the grave clothes behind, taking time to neatly fold the head napkin in another place? How did they remove the body from the wrappings without disturbing the wrappings? If the disciples stole the body, then they all died for a lie. And if the body of Jesus had been stolen by the disciples knowing, how do we explain the apostles seeing and touching the risen Savior. The Romans and Jews had no need to remove the body. They wanted to keep it where it was so that in three days they could open the tomb, produce the body and end any speculation about a risen Messiah.

**V. The Brothers of Jesus.**

- A. Perhaps the best evidence showing that the resurrection of Jesus took place is seen in the complete change of attitude of Jesus’ brothers toward Him.
1. The brothers of Jesus begin as skeptics, believing Him to be “out of His mind.”
    - a. During the Lord’s ministry, the brothers of Jesus (Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3; 1 Corinthians 9:5) were not believers.
    - b. When the popularity of Jesus grew so much that He and His disciples could not even have time alone to eat, the brothers of Jesus began to realize He believed Himself to be the Messiah, the Son of God. Their reaction is typical. “But when His own people heard about this, they went out to lay hold of Him, for they said, ‘He is out of His mind’” (Mark 3:21). They even went to get Him, obviously hoping He would come back home with them so they could get Him away from the crowds that acknowledged Him as the Christ.
    - c. The apostle John says Jesus’ brothers even went to the extent of mocking Him because they didn’t believe His claims to be the Christ (John 7:3-5; compare Matthew 12:46-50; Mark 3:31-35; Luke 8:19-21).
  2. But following the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ, His brothers become believers.

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- a. They are numbered among the 120 “disciples” (followers) of Jesus (Acts 1:12-14).
  - b. James is listed with Peter and John as being one of the “pillars” of the church (Galatians 2:7-9; Acts 15), and one of two “apostles” whom Paul talked with when He first came to Jerusalem (Galatians 1:18-19).
  - c. James, the Lord’s brother, and Jude, the brother of James (and the Lord’s brother) both wrote epistles that have been incorporated into the New Testament – the books of James and Jude.
3. There is only one event that stands between the days when these brothers thought Jesus was “out of His mind,” and the days when these same brothers became leaders in the New Testament church
    - a. That singular event was the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead!
    - b. Jesus appeared to several following His resurrection from the dead, including His brother James (1 Corinthians 15:7).

**CONCLUSION:** The evidence is clear. Jesus was resurrected from the dead by the power of God, appeared alive to His disciples, and ascended into heaven to sit at the right hand of God. The truth of Jesus’ resurrection is proof that we will also be resurrected from the dead. The resurrection of Jesus proves He is the Son of God, and the only One who can give us eternal life.

# Lord, Liar or Lunatic

**Jesus Christ Claims to be God**  
(John 10:30-33; 5:17-18; 8:58)

(We Have Only Two Choices)

**His Claims Were False**  
(We Have Only Two Choices)

He Knew His Claims Were False  
Deliberately Misrepresented Himself  
He Was a Liar  
He Was a Hypocrite  
He Was Demonicallly Influenced  
He Died a Fool

He Didn't Know His Claims Were False  
Sincerely Deluded  
He Was a Lunatic With Delusions of Grandeur

**His Claims Were True**

**He Is Lord !**

(We Have Only Two Choices)

We Will Accept Him

We Will Reject Him

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## Lord, Liar or Lunatic

**INTRODUCTION:** C.S. Lewis, who was a professor at Cambridge University and once an agnostic, wrote, “I am trying here to prevent anyone saying the really foolish thing that people often say about Him (Jesus): ‘I’m trying to accept Jesus as a great moral teacher, but I don’t accept His claim to be God.’ That is the one thing we must not say. A man who was merely a man and said the sort of things Jesus said would not be a great moral teacher. He would either be a lunatic – on a level with the man who says he is a poached egg – or else he would be the Devil of Hell. You must make your choice. Either this man was, and is, the Son of God: or else a madman or something worse... You can shut Him up for a fool, you can spit at Him and kill Him as a demon; or you can fall at His feet and call Him Lord and God. But let us not come up with any patronizing nonsense about His being a great human teacher. He has not left that open to us. He did not intend to.”

### I. Jesus claims to be God.

A. Jesus claims equality with the Father.

1. John 10:30-33: “‘I and My Father are one.’ Then the Jews took up stones again to stone Him. Jesus answered them, ‘Many good works I have shown you from My Father. For which of those works do you stone Me?’ The Jews answered Him, saying, ‘For a good work we do not stone You, but for blasphemy, and because You, being a Man, make Yourself God.’”
  - a. When Jesus said, “I and My Father are ONE,” He used a word that means “one in essence or nature.” A.T. Robertson, a Greek scholar, writes, “This crisp statement is the climax of Christ’s claims concerning the relationship between the Father and Himself (the Son). They stir the Pharisees to uncontrolled anger.”
  - b. It is evident that in the minds of those who heard this statement, there was no doubt but that Jesus claimed He was deity (God the Son).
  - c. The words of Jesus could only be considered as blasphemy, and the Jews proceeded to take judgment into their own hands by preparing to stone Jesus according to the Law (Leviticus 24:16). They would not have attempted to stone Him for simply saying He and the Father were one in purpose, or one in agreement. They clearly understood Jesus to say He and the Father were one in essence and nature – a Divine essence and nature (deity).
2. John 5:17-18: “‘But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father has been working until now, and I have been working.’ Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.’”
  - a. A.T. Robertson writes, “Jesus distinctly says, ‘My Father’ (ho pater mou). Not ‘our Father,’ claim to peculiar relation to the Father. Worketh even until now (heos arti ergazetai)... Jesus put himself on a par with God’s activity and thus justifies his healing on the Sabbath.”

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- b. The Jews did not refer to God as “My Father,” unless they added the phrase “in heaven,” because to do so would be to claim equality with God. However, Jesus didn’t add the phrase “in heaven,” but simply called God His Father, making Himself equal with God.
  - c. Furthermore, when Jesus said that while God works, He also works, the Jews clearly understood the implication. God had healed this man on the Sabbath, and so Jesus worked on the Sabbath as well, because He is God the Son. This is why the Jews sought to kill Him.
3. John 8:58-59: “Jesus said to them, ‘Most assuredly, I say to you, before Abraham was, I AM.’ Then they took up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself and went out of the temple, going through the midst of them, and so passed by.”
- a. In the Old Testament, the “I AM” (Greek “eimi”) was a name God gave to Himself (Exodus 3:14; Deuteronomy 32:39; Isaiah 43:10). This term means the Eternally Existent One, or the Eternal One. When Jesus said, “before Abraham was, I AM,” He was also claiming to be the “I AM” of the Old Testament – the Eternally Existent One, or the Eternal One! Jesus didn’t say, “before Abraham was, I was” – suggesting He once lived before Abraham lived. Rather, He said, “before Abraham was, I AM” – meaning that He is eternal and self-existent, just as the Father is eternal and self-existent.
- B. When faced with the claim of Jesus to be the Son of God, we are faced with two choices.
1. His claims were false.
  2. His claims were true.

**II. If Jesus’ claims are false, there are two choices that remain: either He knew His claims were false, or He didn’t know His claims were false.**

- A. If Jesus knew His claims were false:
1. He deliberately misrepresented Himself.
    - a. It was no mistake. His statements were a deliberate attempt to pass Himself off as the Messiah.
  2. He is a liar.
    - a. It cannot be said that the claims of being the Son of God were made accidentally, or made only by the disciples of Jesus and not by the Lord Himself.
    - b. Jesus was finally convicted before the Sanhedrin of blasphemy on the basis of His own testimony (Mark 14:61-64).
  3. He is a hypocrite.
    - a. The word hypocrite came from the Greek theater where actors wore masks (a happy face to portray joy, a sad face to portray sorrow), and from behind which they would recite their lines. The term means anyone who acts out a role that is completely different from their true character.
    - b. Eventually, the word hypocrite came to mean anyone who outwardly portrays something they are not inwardly.
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- c. Jesus outwardly portrayed Himself to be the Son of God. If Jesus was a mere mortal like everyone else, He lied and was a hypocrite.
  - 4. He was demonically influenced.
    - a. Only someone who was unspeakably evil could have misled people into believing he could give them eternal life.
    - b. Satan is a liar and the father of lies (John 8:44), and anyone who claimed to be the Son of God is certainly demonically influenced – to say the least.
  - 5. He died a fool.
    - a. Jesus' claim to be the Son of God led Him to be crucified.
    - b. If Jesus was only a man, He died a complete fool – needlessly suffering the most cruel form of death imaginable.
  - B. If Jesus didn't know His claims were false:
    - 1. He was sincerely deluded.
      - a. Actually, the family of Jesus thought He was deluded (Mark 3:21, 31-35; John 7:2-5).
      - b. But following the resurrection, they were among His followers, and played a leading role in the early church (Acts 1:12-14; Galatians 1:18-19; 2:7-9; Acts 15; and the books of James and Jude).
    - 2. He was a lunatic with delusions of grandeur.
      - a. For someone to think He is God is the height of insanity, and would place Jesus in the same category of a Charles Manson.
  - C. Jesus is neither a liar nor a lunatic.
    - 1. The life and sayings of Jesus are certainly not those of a deceiver and a liar. His teachings raised the moral consciousness of mankind to the highest level imaginable.
    - 2. The character of Jesus is certainly not that of a lunatic with delusions of grandeur. He is always seen in complete control of every situation, never acting harshly, and His treatment of even His enemies speaks of emotional strength and stability.

### **III. If Jesus' claims were true:**

- A. He is Lord!
  - 1. This would mean Jesus is who He claimed to be.
    - a. He is the Son of God, and is equal to the Father (John 10:30-33; John 5:17-18; John 8:58-59).
    - b. He is worthy of the same honors given to God (John 5:20-23).
    - c. He is worthy of worship (Matthew 4:10; Luke 4:8; Matthew 8:2; John 9:35-39; Matthew 14:33; John 20:27-29).
- B. If Jesus is Lord, that leaves us with two choices:
  - 1. We can accept Him as our Lord and Savior.
    - a. We need to believe (John 3:16; Hebrews 11:6).
    - b. We need to repent (Luke 13:3).
    - c. We need to confess our faith in Him (Matthew 10:32; Romans 10:9-10).
    - d. We need to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:1-4; 1 Peter 3:21).

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2. We can reject Him.
    - a. But there will be consequences to those who reject Jesus as God the Son (Luke 10:16).

**CONCLUSION:** There is really only one choice. Jesus is truly the Son of God, and we need to accept that fact, and surrender our lives to Him in complete obedience.

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## The Cost of Discipleship

**INTRODUCTION:** “Now great multitudes went with Him. And He turned and said to them, ‘If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it; lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, “This man began to build and was not able to finish.” Or what king, going to make war against another king, does not sit down first and consider whether he is able with ten thousand to meet him who comes against him with twenty thousand? Or else, while the other is still a great way off, he sends a delegation and asks conditions of peace. So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has cannot be My disciple.” (Luke 14:25-33)

### **I. Jesus clearly placed uncompromising demands on anyone who would become His disciple.**

#### A. Discipleship demands:

1. Supreme Love (Luke 14:26).
  - a. Our love for Jesus must be so great that by contrast it appears as though we hate our parents, wife, children, brothers and sisters, and our own life. We must love all these “less” (Matthew 10:37) – much less.
  - b. Our love for God must be total – with all our heart, with all our strength, and with all our mind (Luke 10:27).
2. Suffering (Luke 14:27).
  - a. The cross was always associated with suffering and death. Bearing (taking up) our cross means being willing to suffer all the reproach and persecutions that go along with being a disciple of Christ. It means “dying” to anything that stands between us and the Lord.
3. Serious Consideration (Luke 14:28-32).
  - a. Jesus challenged everyone to give serious consideration before becoming His disciple. He urged them to think about the personal sacrifices they would be required to make. It would be better for them not to begin, than once becoming a disciple, to turn away from the Lord (2 Peter 2:20-22).
4. Sacrifice (Luke 14:33).
  - a. We must be willing to give up anything that interferes with following Jesus. Nothing is worth more than our soul, not even life itself (Matthew 16:25-26).

### **II. The disciple of Christ must be willing to give up many things to follow Jesus.**

- #### A. An ungodly lifestyle (Galatians 5:16-21; Ephesians 4:25-5:7, 12; Colossians 3:1-9).
1. After being baptized into Christ, we become a new creature (a new man). Our old manner of life must be crucified (put to death) so that sin can no longer control us or reign over us (Romans 6:1-18).

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- B. An unequally yoked relationship (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).
    - 1. Unequally yoked means being so intimately linked together with someone that they control or influence us.
      - a. Unequally yoked in Business Relationships.
        - (1). Christians are given specific guidelines as employers and employees (Ephesians 6:5-9; Colossians 3:22-4:1).
        - (2). Honesty and integrity must mark every activity in business. The disciple of Christ can never be unequally yoked in any business activity or relationship that does not practice the principle “Therefore, whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets” (Matthew 7:12).
      - b. Unequally yoked in Social Relationships.
        - (1). Companions and associates may have a weakening effect on us (1 Corinthians 5:9-11; 15:33; 2 Thessalonians 3:11-14).
  - C. An unscriptural marriage (Matthew 5:32; Matthew 19:9).
    - 1. Jesus made it clear that there is only one reason for divorce – adultery, or the unfaithfulness of your marriage partner. Only the innocent party has a right to remarry, according to what Jesus taught here, while the guilty party does not have a right to remarry. Under the Old Testament Law of Moses, those guilty of adultery were put to death. Under the New Testament Law of Christ, those guilty of adultery are forbidden to remarry.
    - 2. Those who are not scripturally married cannot remain in that relationship and be disciples of Christ (Matthew 19:12; Romans 7:1-3; cf. Ezra 9:12-15; 10:3-4, 44).

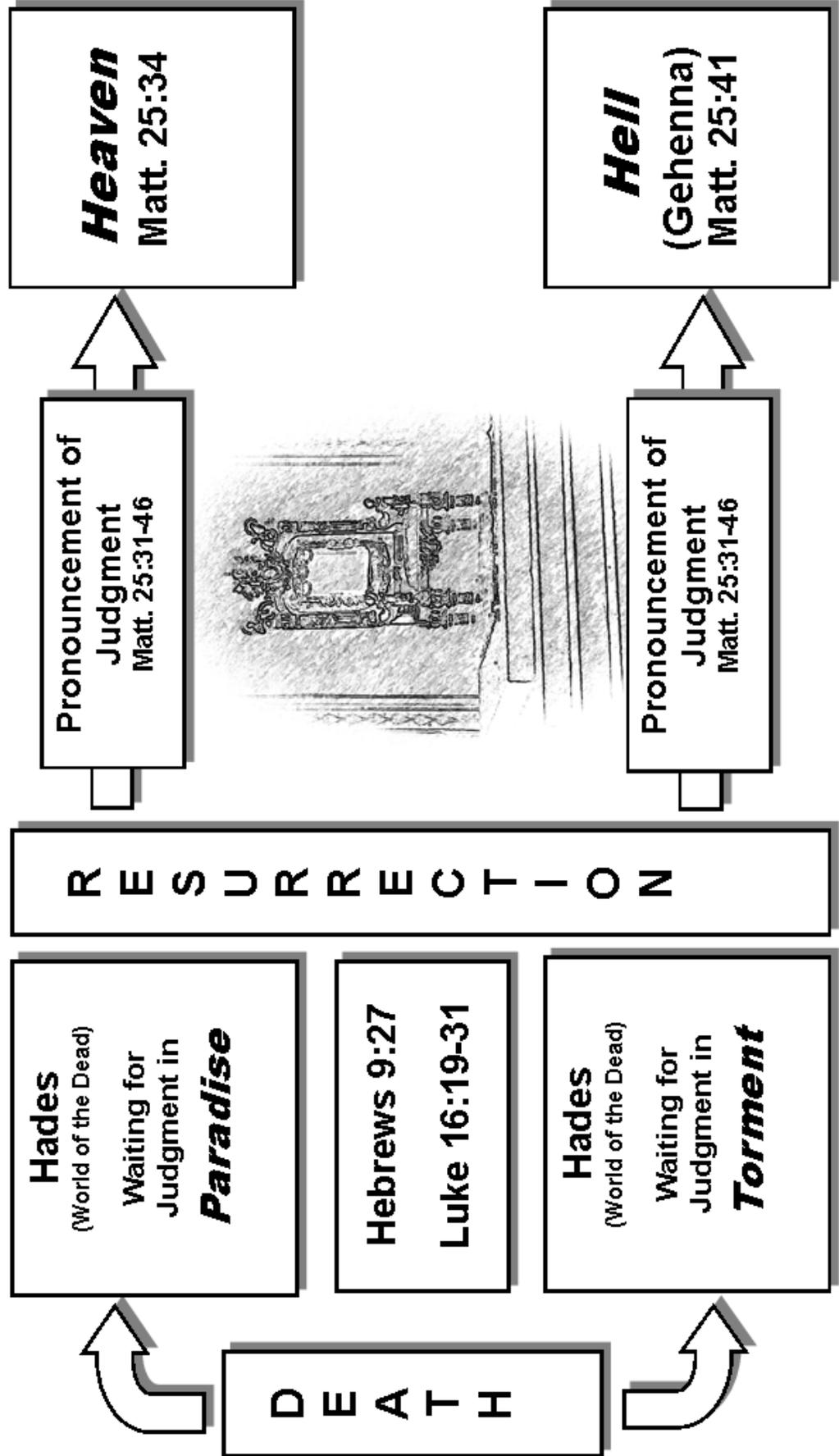
### **III. Being a disciple of Christ also means accepting certain responsibilities.**

- A. Our responsibilities come in a wide range of categories:
  - 1. Responsibilities to our families.
    - a. As husbands and wives (Ephesians 5:22-23; 1 Peter 3:1-7).
    - b. As parents (Ephesians 6:1-4)
  - 2. Responsibilities to Christ and the church.
    - a. In Prayer (Colossians 4:2-4; 1 Thessalonians 5:17-18; Philippians 4:6-7).
    - b. In Bible study (2 Timothy 2:15).
    - c. In the Lord’s Supper (1 Corinthians 11:23-29; Acts 20:7).
    - d. In Singing (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16).
    - e. In Giving (1 Corinthians 16:1-2; 2 Corinthians 9:5-7).
    - f. In Assembling with other Christians (Hebrews 10:22-26).
    - g. In Teaching others (1 Peter 3:15; Acts 8:3-4; Hebrews 5:11-14).
- B. There is a place for everyone in the Lord’s church, and the disciple of Christ will find and fulfill their place (Ephesians 4:8-16).
  - 1. As a disciple of Christ, we need to be equipped to perform one specific duty – “ministering to the saints.”
    - a. This means we need to grow spiritually to the point where we are capable of ministering to the needs of others, rather than being the kind of person who constantly needs to be ministered to.

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- b. Disciples of Christ grow and mature in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18), and become a partaker of the Divine Nature of Jesus Christ (2 Peter 1:2-4) so that we can display His Divine Character in our lives to others.

# Heaven and Hell

(The Final Judgment)



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