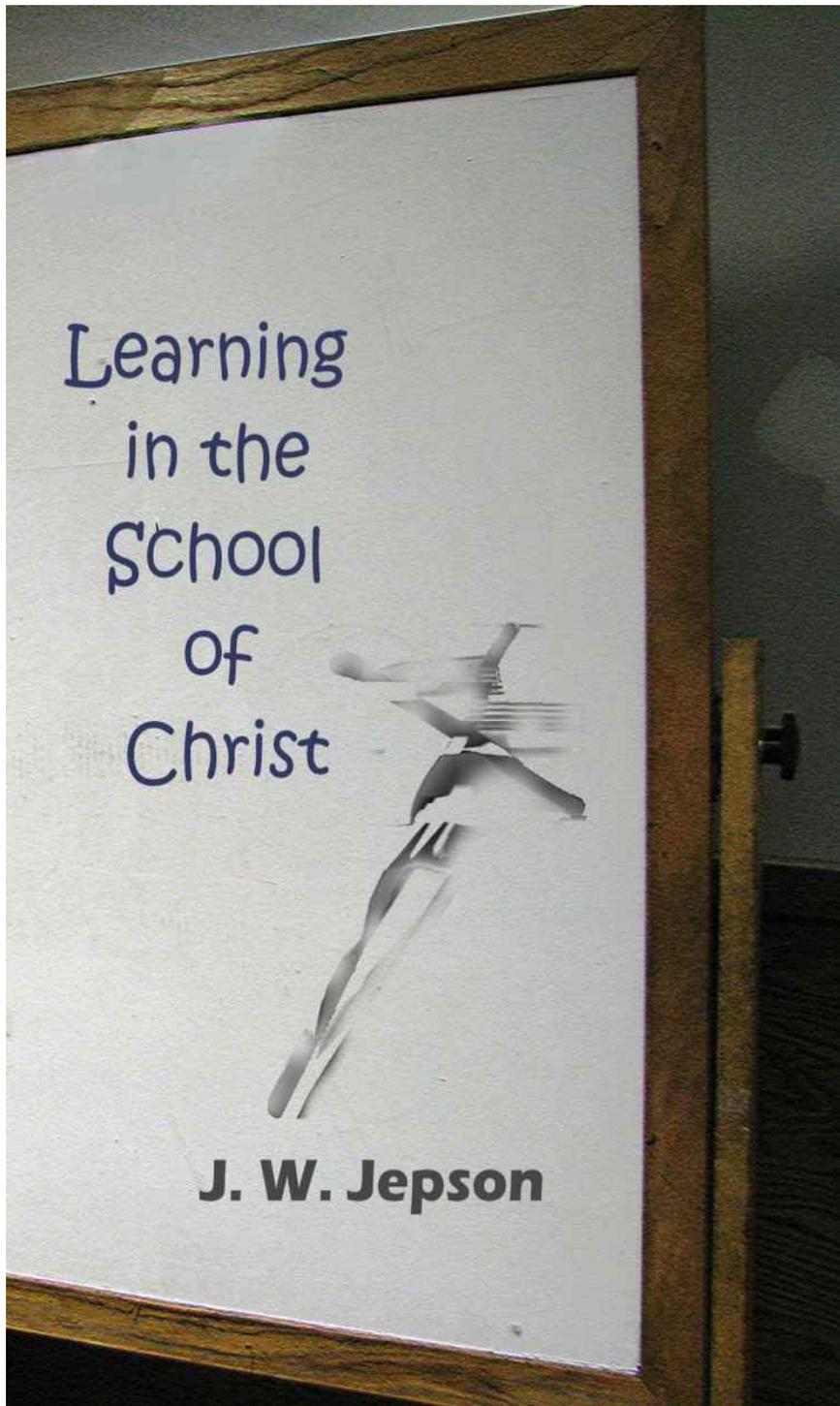


LEARNING IN THE SCHOOL OF CHRIST
by J. W. Jepson, D.Min.



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CHAPTER ONE: THE GRAND DESIGN

Did you ever wonder why God created the human race?

Just think. Nothing takes God by surprise. He knows the end from the beginning. He knows the potential outcome of every possible course of action.

So before God created Adam and Eve as moral agents (with a free will), He knew exactly what was going to happen. He knew that they would use that God-given free will to disobey Him and in so doing they would introduce into this world human sin with all of its horrific consequences.

God saw that the entire human race would follow their first parents down the destructive road of disobedience. He saw ahead of time all of the heartache, sorrow, and suffering that selfishness would cause, both for time and for eternity. He saw all the wars, the violence, the injustices, the divorces, the broken hearts and homes, the traumatized children, the immorality and greed, and all the evils that sprout out of the love of money.

Most of all, God saw the eternal consequences of human disobedience. He saw that the majority of humanity—that masterpiece of His creation—would persist in their evil rebellion and be lost forever. And only God knows the full tragedy of even one soul being lost forever in hell as the just and necessary penalty for moral rebellion; and He saw that tragedy multiplied by the billions.

God knew also that to save a comparative minority would cost Him nothing less than the agonizing death of His Son, Jesus Christ—God in Christ—on the cross.

Knowing all this ahead of time, God went right ahead and created the human race.

Why?

Well, first of all, God is love (1 John 4:8). That means that in everything He does or allows to be done, God's ultimate purpose is to secure the greatest possible amount of good and happiness, all things being considered together. So then, God must be after something so supremely and eternally valuable in itself, to Himself, and to the entire universe that it far outweighs the unavoidable consequences of sin, as awful as those consequences are.

God is also all-wise (Romans 16:27). That means that God has taken the

present course of action to secure the supremely valuable objective because, all things considered, it is the best course that His perfect love and infinite wisdom could possibly devise. It only makes sense that if there had been a better way, God would have chosen it. He chose this way because it is by far the best way, and probably the only way.

So then, what can be so supremely and eternally important—and that can be secured no better way—that its value far outweighs all the horrible evils God saw would happen in the process? Whatever it is, it must form the grand design of the ages. It must be the very reason for our existence and therefore our highest personal priority.

Whatever it is, it is essential that we know and understand it clearly, lock into it with all our heart and soul, and pursue it with full commitment and steadfast diligence.

So, what is it?

Well, remember that God had a perfect and supremely happy kingdom. All the angels and archangels were in their proper places, everyone loving God, devoted to Him, and obedient to His just and wise administration of the universal moral law—the law of love.

Then something devastating happened, something that effectively introduced "hell into heaven," violating the very nature of Heaven itself. Satan, an archangel, introduced rebellion into God's perfect and happy kingdom. Against the holy and wholesome will of God, against all reason, and against the well-being of the universe, Satan asserted, "I will!"

That declaration terrorized Paradise, and it has been terrorizing the universe ever since. A massive minority of the angels followed Satan's criminal act.

And so, in a sense, God's perfect kingdom failed Him.

Why?

Because it had one unavoidable weakness. *It was made out of previously untested components.* When the test came, part of it collapsed.

But God is going to have a kingdom that will never fail. His interests are infinitely valuable. He is worthy of highest love, devotion, and obedience. To deny this to God would be an immeasurable loss, both to Himself and to all beings. He must have a people who will render to Him what is rightfully His, both for His own sake and also for the sake of the universe.

Also, because love is the very essence of His moral character, God must have a people upon whom He can lavish His love fully and forever with absolute safety.

Both require a relationship based on moral character that has been fully developed and thoroughly tested.

So, why didn't God just create a new group of angels to replace the ones that fell?

Because that would be again building out of previously untested components.

Then why not just make do with the angels who remained loyal?

Because the angels had just witnessed an awesome demonstration of the justice of God; but without a full revelation of the mercy of God, that would have given them a less than complete knowledge of the character of God. That full revelation would come in God's great redemptive act in Jesus Christ and in His glorious purpose in the Church (Ephesians 3:10, 11).

Then why not create beings who have no free will and therefore are incapable of sinning?

That would not work, because they would also be incapable of loving and obeying God. They would be robots at worse or mere pets at best. They would be incapable of moral action, thus incapable of moral character, and thus incapable of any real and meaningful relationship with God.

No, this time instead of starting at the top, God started at an entirely different point of beginning. God did the most dangerous thing that He could do. He created us in His image and after His likeness (Genesis 1:26). In so doing He endowed us with a free will, knowing full well that we would use that free will to turn against Him, with all the devastating consequences.

Nevertheless, God did not take a chance on an uncertain outcome. Remember, God has perfect foreknowledge. Nothing takes Him by surprise. When Adam and Eve sinned, God did not exclaim, "Oh, no! I didn't know *that* was going to happen! Now, what are we doing to do? Let's go to 'Plan B'. I'll go to earth in the person of Jesus Christ. He will die on a cross as the perfect substitute to provide redemption, and then rise again. We will send The Holy Spirit. If some people repent and are saved by faith in Jesus Christ, we will mobilize them into a body called the Church and send them into all the world to tell the rest of humanity. When it is all over, we will see who finally gets to Heaven. Then we will figure out what to do with them."

Of course not! God is not the "Supreme Guesser."

Before the ages began, God saw ahead of time that He could turn the hearts of untold millions to Himself. He foreknew them—not only what they would do but also what He could do with them.

If you love God, God saw you in your former sin and rebellion. He saw you respond to Christ, to His word, to His Spirit. He saw you repent and become a believer. He saw everything you would go through, and He knew exactly how to make all things work together for your good. He saw everything the world, the flesh, and the devil would throw at you, and He saw you coming through victorious by laying hold of His overcoming and sustaining grace!

God knew that His grace will secure and stabilize your steadfast love and obedience under the severest temptations and trials, in spite of temporary failures and set-backs. He knew that when those temptations and trials were over and the pressures of the world, the flesh, and the devil were removed, He would have a kingdom *that will never fail*—and you will be a part of it!

That is the meaning of life. *That* is the true purpose of our existence. And it is found only in a personal relationship with God in Jesus Christ.

Your everlasting love and obedience, developed, tested and proven in the fires of temptations and trials—*that* is the supremely and eternally valuable objective God is after. For that God is willing to allow all the unavoidable evils to happen in the process, as immense as they are. For that God sent His son to die on the cross to save us. That should open our eyes to see the value of every believer, and how vitally important it is that each one of us stays true to Christ. God has everything at stake in us. Let us never lose sight of that fact.

Yes, we will have a free will in Heaven. Otherwise, what would be the purpose of the character building process that is now going on and being perfected in believers? The love, devotion, and obedience that we will give to God forever will be voluntary.

But what guarantee is there that sometime in eternity somebody will not sin and we will have this mess all over again?

We have a wonderful answer in Revelation 22:3. After picturing the glories of Heaven, the passage ends with these words: "and His servants shall serve Him." In other words, God looks at the totality of eternity future (so to speak) and declares in effect, "I have so won the hearts of my elect and so built my love and my character into them that they will *never fail!*"

God is going to have a fail-proof kingdom!

God has eternal plans for His chosen ones; and if you love God, you are part of those plans!

Second Timothy 1:9 says that God has "saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began." Think of it! *Before the world began!*

Ephesians 1:4 assures us that God has chosen us in Christ "before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love."

The apostle Peter says that we are "elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ" (1 Peter 1:2).

Please notice that 1 Peter 1:2 does not say that we are foreknown according to the election of God, but "elect according to the foreknowledge of God." The "election" does not follow the "foreknowledge" in time, because it all happens together in the eternal mind and purpose of God; however, the election is *predicated* on God's foreknowledge. God's choice is not arbitrary, but takes into account His foreknowledge of our susceptibility to His grace. That in turn guides Him in where and how to invest His grace where it will be effective.

We *do* have a definite choice in our destiny. So, what did God foreknow about you and your susceptibility to His grace? What choices did God from eternity foresee you making right now in this present life in response to His gracious influences, choices that mold your moral character and determine your eternal destiny? *That* is up to you. That is why we are to make our "calling and election sure" (2 Peter 1:10).

Believers do not live mundane, meaningless lives. We carry in us the eternal purpose of God! We are the centerpiece of God's grand design of the ages. For us the worlds were created. In response to all of this, what kind of lives should we be living? What priceless and eternal values should energize us?

Genuine Christians should be the most highly motivated people on the face of the earth. Each day, each moment, is charged with eternal potential and possibilities. The high calling of God demands that we aim at nothing less than being our very best for God. What a challenge! What a high and holy ambition!

The apostle Paul prayed that the eyes of our hearts would be enlightened to know the hope of His calling and "the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:17, 18).

Believers are destined for nothing less than total and eternal fellowship with God Himself. And that requires moral compatibility with Him—conformity to His character. There must be nothing in our character that is incompatible with the character of God, and every moral quality in His character must have its counterpart in ours.

Above all else, God is building character in believers because *character is forever!* What we are to be we are becoming.

And so, what is the final product? What is our destiny?

Here it is in Romans 8:28 and 29. "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose. For whom He did foreknow, He also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren."

The elect are predestined not only to get to Heaven but also to be conformed to the character of God, revealed in Jesus Christ. If you love God, God is determined—He has made up His mind—that you are going to be like Jesus, no matter what it takes! God has invested too much in us and the stakes are too high for Him to do a half-way, second-rate job on us. So whatever it takes is more than worth it.

That means we can come either the easy way or the hard way. Either way, God is going to do it. So, let's not make it hard on ourselves. Let's cooperate with The Holy Spirit, live Biblically, and save ourselves a lot of problems, pain, and paddlings.

This is one reason why God did not take us to Heaven the moment we became Christians. He left us here to bring others to Him, of course. He also left us here to go through a *process*. He is building permanent character in us, and He is doing so under the pressures of life. We are in "the University of Adversity."

Second Corinthians 4:17 says that "our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory." Notice, it is all working for us, not against us. The NIV puts it this way: "For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all."

This present world is an excellent place to develop saints. It provides a fully equipped workshop for building us into the image of Christ. There are so many problems and provocations, so many hassles, so many people getting on our case, so many trials and temptations. Every day is loaded with excellent

opportunities to be like Jesus!

But if we are destined to "soar with the saints," why in the meanwhile do we have to put up with so many sinners?

Well, let us imagine a football game with only one team on the field. No opposition. The team that showed up would make a touchdown every play (that is, if nobody dropped the ball). The quarterback takes the ball from the center, and everybody strolls down the field together. After all, how much personal discipline does it take to walk a hundred yards? Nobody has to stay in shape. Nobody has to obey the training rules. The team on the field would win every game.

But the victory would be meaningless.

But put an opposing team on the field, looking at you eye-to-eye across the scrimmage line. Now what do you do? You dig in your cleats and give it all you have. You think beyond the goal line, and you are determined to get there in spite of everything the other guys do to stop you. You have been training, working out, staying in shape, learning the rules and honing your skills. Now it is time to *do it!*

But people who love God are already predestined to win. So why try? Why do anything about it?

Okay. Let's imagine that it were possible (though it is not possible in real life) to view the film of the game you are about to play *before you play it*. You watch yourself carrying the ball play after play. You get excited as you see yourself making first downs. You wince as you see yourself flat on your back after being thrown for a loss. The coach sends in the key play. Excited, you watch intently as you take the hand-off. You break tackles. Your team is opening up big holes and taking out the secondary. Only the safety stands in your way, but your momentum carries you past him and into the end zone for the winning score!

After viewing the film, what do you do? Do you shrug your shoulders and say, "I know I'm going to win; so what's the use of going out there and playing the game?"

No way! It is time to take to the field. But now you are all charged up and raring to go out there and make those plays. You are full of confidence because you know that, no matter what happens, you are going to win!

For believers this life is a training ground for eternity. Through Christ we are sure to win. Still, we have to experience the training course.

People who die in infancy go straight to Heaven. Jesus said this about little children: "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God" (Mark 10:14). "Take heed that you do not despise one of these little ones, for I say to you that in heaven their angels do always see the face of My Father who is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10).

People who die in infancy and go to Heaven will experience forever the basic joys of Heaven. Also, they will not remain infants. Furthermore, they will come to a full knowledge of God and His truth. However, God will not give a person who died in infancy the same rewards, nor entrust to that person the same positions of authority and degrees of responsibility that He will to those who faithfully and consistently walked with Him and went through the character building process on this earth for 30, 40, 50, 60 years or more.

To become like Jesus means to "know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable to His death" (Philippians 3:10). It means to have the fruit of the Spirit developed and matured in us, because the fruit of the Spirit is the character—the moral nature—of Jesus Christ.

To be like Jesus we must diligently pursue an intimate relationship with Him. We must spend time with Him, giving The Holy Spirit the opportunity to make Him real to us. In 2 Corinthians 3:18 we read, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."

This is a direct, intimate relationship in The Holy Spirit with nothing between our soul and the Savior—no veil, no sin, no clutter of distractions, nothing to put Him "out of focus."

Have you ever watched a potter working at his wheel? As the lump of clay spins around and around, what does the potter do? Does he or she take a club and beat on the clay, muttering, "I'm going to make a vessel out of you even if I have to knock you into shape!"

No. Instead, the potter applies gentle pressure to the pliable clay. As the clay yields to the master's skillful fingers, under the potter's hand a beautiful vase takes shape.

The Holy Spirit is like that master potter. He applies gentle but effective pressure on us to shape us into a vessel of honor. Our problem is that we are usually too sensitive and responsive to the impulses of our own human spirit. We react too much to our own emotions. That gets us into all kinds of trouble. The bumper sticker slogan, "If it feels good, do it," is a prescription for disaster.

Instead, we need to quiet ourselves before God and learn to be sensitive and responsive to The Holy Spirit. No matter what the provocation, no matter what people say or do, no matter what emotions we feel or how strong they are, the important thing at that moment is not to say what we feel like saying or do what we feel like doing. It is not to assert our rights or set somebody straight. The *most* important thing at that moment is *to be like Jesus*.

The story is told that when Michelangelo was asked about his procedure in creating his sculpture of David, he replied: "How do I create a sculpture of David? It's simple. I remove everything that doesn't look like David."

Sometimes we may feel like a block of marble in a sculptor's studio. Will we ever be like Jesus? We realize that we have so far to go. But we must remember: We are predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, and God is not through with us yet. We are in the "studio of the Holy Spirit, and He is working daily to "remove everything that doesn't look like Jesus."

So if there is anything in your character, your nature, your personality, your behavior that does not look like Jesus, you can be sure that sooner or later The Holy Spirit is going to go to work on it. As He does, go ahead and say "Ouch," but do not pull away. Hold steady and let The Holy Spirit do His perfect work. Keep in mind that He is shaping you for your glorious destiny.

Jesus said, "The disciple is not above his master, but every one that is perfect shall be as his master" (Luke 6:40). The word, "perfect," means mended, repaired, completed, prepared.

The apostle John wrote, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has his hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure" (1 John 3:2, 3 NIV).

The major instrument that God uses to fashion us into the image of Christ is His word. Jesus prayed, "Sanctify them through thy truth; thy word is truth" (John 17:17 KJV).

And Peter wrote, "He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust" (2 Peter 1:4).

Jesus is the living Word of God. The Bible is the written Word of God. The two match perfectly. The image of Jesus Christ is indelibly imprinted in The Scriptures.

Let us refer back for a moment to 2 Corinthians 3:18. "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord."

There is a saying that goes something like this: "As we as the children of God look into the Word of God, the Spirit of God transforms us into the image of the Son of God."

God also uses the Church and its ministry in this process. Christian growth and maturity do not take place in isolation, but in relationship. It happens in fellowship with other believers who also share in "the hope of His calling" (Ephesians 1:18). We must not reject Christ's Church. It is His body and every believer is a part of it. Those irritating saints might be some of the very people God is using to help us to become like Jesus!

Ephesians 4:11-16 say that God has given us ministers to prepare us for service, so that the body of Christ (the Church) will be built up, until "we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ." We are to "grow up into Him in all things."

This is the desire of true ministers. The apostle Paul said that the objective of his preaching and teaching was to present every believer perfect (complete, mature) in Christ (Colossians 1:28).

The goal of every true pastor is to be able on the day of Christ to say to Him, "Lord, here is _____ Church. I have fed them Your Word, watched over them, prayed for them, and endeavored to be an example to them. They have been teachable and responsive; and now here they are. I am delighted with them. *They are just like Jesus.*

It is sad to see so many professed Christians who right now are all they ever intend to be. But those who have caught the vision of the eternal purpose of God join the apostle Paul in declaring, "This one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus!" (Philippians 3:13, 14).

Friend, if you do not know the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, you do not know the real meaning of life. You are missing the purpose of your very existence. You are on the wrong path. Each day you are making and reinforcing choices that are forming the wrong kind of character and preparing for the wrong destiny. The heart that is self-willed, rebellious, and disobedient cannot have fellowship with God, and it is totally unfit for the kingdom of God.

If you are not right with God, Satan also has a plan for you; and if you only knew what that plan is, it would terrify you. You have the potential of eternal fellowship with God, but you are wasting your time in sin, preparing yourself for the wrong eternity. If you keep going the way you are now, you will end up on the "scrap heap" of eternity, a total loss. You could have spent eternity with God, the angels, and the redeemed; but instead you will spend eternity with Satan and demons. What a waste! What an unspeakable tragedy!

No, friend, it is not too late. Surrender your heart to Christ now. Trust Him as your Savior and then follow Him as your Lord. God loves you. He has a glorious plan, and you can be a part of it. Lock into God's plan. He will give full meaning and purpose to your life.

Jesus invites us all: "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28, 29 NIV).

Let us learn in the school of Christ.

CHAPTER TWO:

JESUS CHRIST: THE TEACHER AND THE CURRICULUM

Jesus Christ is the perfect image of the character of God. All virtues display their perfection in Him. Therefore, if the character of God is to be developed in us as believers, we must learn from Jesus.

Jesus said, "Learn from *me*" (Matthew 11:29). As Christians, we learn our values, our categories, our life philosophy and world view from Jesus Christ, not from the underlying premises and presuppositions of this present world system.

James lays out the contrast between the wisdom of this age and the wisdom from above. "Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such 'wisdom' does not come down from heaven, but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere" (James 3:13-17 NIV).

The prevailing "wisdom" of this age is ego-centric (self-centered), subjective, self-gratifying, changeable, temporary, demonic and destructive. The true, heavenly wisdom is theo-centric (God-centered), objective, self-subordinating, stable, permanent, pure; and as perfectly symmetrical, wholesome, beautiful, and productive of joy and happiness as Heaven itself.

The two produce directly opposite kinds of "spirituality," each according to its own source and nature. So, "let no man deceive you with empty words" (Ephesians 5:6), but follow "wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ..." (1 Timothy 6:3).

Jesus Christ declared emphatically, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No man comes to the Father but by me" (John 14:6). Our Lord and Savior did not and will not yield one particle of His divine exclusiveness to the notions of any of the religious and philosophical fabrications floating back and forth on the tides of confused cultures, ancient or modern.

"I AM THE TRUTH!"

Jesus Christ is "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Many years ago Bishop Fulton Sheen said, "Jesus Christ personalized all

truth in Himself."

This does encompass the whole body of historical, scientific, and technological knowledge. It does not refer to the truth or falsity of what is said and done in the daily living of billions of people (for example, whether or not Joe changed the oil in his car yesterday). It is referring to ultimate truth: the truth about God, being, God's great acts in creation and redemption, the meaning and purpose of life, real values, the moral law, and the principles that guide practical living. It is "all things that pertain to life and godliness" (2 Peter 1:3). All of this is personalized in Jesus Christ.

Learning from Him means asking: "what would Jesus do?" "how would Jesus think?" "what attitudes would Jesus take?" "how would Jesus respond?" "what motives would guide Jesus?" "what are Jesus' values?" and, towering over it all, "what did Jesus say?"

Is anyone out there who has never done something foolish or stupid? If so, I would like to meet you. I want to touch the hem of your garment.

I have never met the person who has always done the wise thing. It is certainly not the person I see in the mirror each morning!

Paul the apostle also analyzed the two contrasting and contradicting kinds of "wisdom" in 1 Corinthians 1:22-30. "For Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumblingblock and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of the world and the things which are despised God has chosen, and the things which are not, to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence. But of Him you are in Christ Jesus, who became for us wisdom from God—and righteousness, and sanctification—and redemption—that, as it is written, '*He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.*'"

In this passage we notice especially that Jesus Christ is "the wisdom of God" (verse 24), and our "wisdom from God" (verse 30).

In Christ are hidden "all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3).

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom..." (Colossians 3:16).

Every foolish thing that we do, we do because we fail to open the Bible and prayerfully take a good look at Jesus Christ, our wisdom from God. Conversely, when we come to The Scriptures, learn from Him and follow Him, we choose and act wisely.

Choices contrary to Christ are choices contrary to wisdom; choices that conform to Christ are choices that conform to wisdom. Therefore, to choose wisely and to live wisely we must bring all of our values, our attitudes, our behavior into conformity to Him. He is our wisdom.

In Ephesians 4:17-19 the apostle Paul described the mental vanity and the spiritual darkness that characterizes the gentile world—the world that is either ignorant of the Judeo-Christian revelation or has rejected it. Following is the apostolic analysis.

"This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind, having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who being past feeling have given themselves over to lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness."

We notice that wrong believing results in wrong living. Falsehood in the mind produces falsehood in the character and life. In fact, the adoption of wrong thinking and believing is often driven by a desire to justify wrong behavior. The ignorance is the result of blindness of heart, not intellect. In such cases desire suppresses reason; truth is trampled under passion.

By contrast, the apostle continues in verses 20-24 as follows. "But you have not so learned Christ, if so be that you have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus; that you put off concerning the former conversation [way of life—NIV] the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts, and be renewed in the spirit of your mind; and that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness."

We notice particularly the statements in verses 20 and 21. In contrast to the suppressed reason and resulting moral degeneracy around us, *we learned Christ*. The two are total opposites and do not mix.

Because the truth is in Him, *Jesus Christ is both the Teacher and the Curriculum*. We do not learn from Him merely by a transfer of information, although that is part of the process. This is not "distance education." It is more than a series of lectures given by an instructor in front of a class. It is more than just reading a textbook. It is the result of a personal relationship with the Author.

We learn in a continuing relationship. Jesus said, "Come to me... take my yoke... learn from me."

Let us take time to consider the powerful significance of the metaphor of the yoke.

Picture the scene in your mind. We envision a simple society where oxen are commonly used in the fields. Some men are working with an inexperienced, undisciplined, impulsive, flighty young ox. To one side stands a sturdy, trained older ox. The men move the younger ox into position alongside the older ox. Suddenly down comes the heavy wooden yoke across the necks of both oxen. The younger ox balks and jerks, but it does not go anywhere. The older ox keeps him firmly in place.

Now what? There is a field to be plowed, and those two oxen are going to plow it. Their day's activities are already planned for them. The younger ox is going to learn—period!—and he is going to learn in relationship. He is going where the older ox goes and when the older ox goes. He is going to do exactly what the older ox does. He is going to stop giving in to his impulses and settle down to a disciplined, productive life.

Now, let's return to what Jesus said. First, "Come to me." Surrender. Line up beside Him, facing and heading in the same direction, ready to move forward with Him and pursue His purposes and goals.

Next, our Lord invites us to take His yoke upon us. Notice that He is not going to impose it on us. It is our choice. We are to take it up and put it on. However, once we take it upon ourselves, it is to remain there. It is not like a rain slicker we put on at the door when we go out to get the mail and then take off again as soon as we come back in. This is a commitment to a personal relationship, a long-term learning process, a lifetime of discipleship.

Also, Jesus assures us, "you shall find rest to your souls; for my yoke is easy and my burden is light." His yoke is not the heavy, burdensome wooden yoke the oxen had to wear. Sin is the heavy, burdensome yoke. When we take Christ's yoke on us and synchronize our lives with His, we no longer suffer the problems and pains that self-will brings on us. We no longer sing, "I did it *my* way" (what a mess!). The truth has made us free (John 8:32). We give up our selfish pride with its conflicts and alienation, and instead learn from Him who is "meek and lowly in heart."

The result? We find rest to our souls. We longed for it for years, and finally found it in our "coupleness with Christ."

Conformity to Jesus Christ is both internal and external; that is, it is both

inside and outside. On the inside, conformity to Christ is the result of His living presence within the believer. Paul testified, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless, I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me, and the life that I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me" (Galatians 2:20).

The Christian life is more than an effort to live for Christ. It is Christ living in us. It is a life of faith and therefore a life of victory. When we invite Jesus Christ to come in, He does not become a passenger on the flight. He goes straight to the control room and assumes His rightful command position. So, as the slogan says, "If God is your Co-pilot, change seats."

Again in his inspired letter to the Galatians Paul comes back to this truth in 4:19. He addresses them as "my little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you."

The Galatian believers were in grave danger of being led away from their liberty in Christ back to the bondage of the religious externals of Judaism. The solution was for Christ to become "duplicated" within them. That is, if they would remain in The Spirit in a dynamic relationship with Jesus Christ, He would establish Himself within them, strengthening their faith and molding their character to His. Paul likened his agonizing prayer for God to bring this about to birthpangs again on their behalf. The first time had been his intense prayers and labors for their salvation.

Paul also prayed for believers, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith" (Ephesians 3:17).

So conformity to the character image of Jesus Christ takes place on the inside as the result of His living presence in us.

Conformity to His image also takes place externally, in our lifestyle and behavior. It is "Jesus on the inside, working on the outside."

Writing to the same Galatian believers Paul says, "For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." We who have been baptized "into" (in relation, reference, regard to) Christ have "clothed" ourselves with Christ. We have put on His lifestyle and behavior. His character comes through from the inside to the outside.

This is not necessarily automatic, with no conscious choices on our part. Although believers have already "put on Christ," we are still urged in Romans 13:14 to "put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh to fulfill the lusts thereof." The virtues of Christ are a full wardrobe for the believer. In baptism we put on Christ as a once-for-all identification with Him in His death,

burial, and resurrection. We "took on the uniform," as it were. Now we daily "put on Christ" as we consciously choose to conform our behavior to Him in the moment-by-moment situations and challenges of life. His righteousness within us makes us attractive models for the "fashion show" of His graces. The fabrics are heavenly and the designs are truly "out of this world."

"Put on the Lord Jesus Christ." Believers are to display Him to the world. Do we "showcase" Jesus to the people we associate with daily or that we encounter in the various contacts of life? Do we give them a true picture of Him? Do they know what He is like because they know us?

Model Christ.

"Kindness looks good on you."

"Humility looks good on you."

"Modesty looks good on you."

"Patience looks good on you."

"Holiness looks good on you."

"Joy looks good on you."

Learning from Jesus and being conformed to His character image is not a "static state." That is, it is not passive. We do not just sit around and let it happen to us. We do not wait for some imaginary metaphysical "spiritual" transformation. It involves the active participation of our will. It is spiritual in the true sense that it consists in voluntary growth in grace in conformity to our increasing knowledge of Christ. It is an active lifestyle lived out day by day wherever we are in life. It is truly a daily walk.

"As you have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith, as you have been taught, abounding in it with thanksgiving" (Colossians 6, 7).

"He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked" (1 John 2:6).

Believers are to think like Jesus, talk like Jesus, act like Jesus. In this way we continuously bring Him into our personal world—enlightening it, challenging it, changing it.

The Holy Spirit is the primary agent in this life-long process of conforming us

to Christ. After all, The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of Christ (Romans 8:9). Without His Spirit, it would be only a self-improvement effort, just another tiresome religious regimen.

The Holy Spirit makes Jesus real to us. He keeps our love for Him alive and glowing. He keeps us full of the joy of the Lord.

Jesus promised, "When he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth; for he shall not speak of himself, but whatever he shall hear, that shall he speak, and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me, for he shall receive of mine and shall show it to you. All things that the Father has are mine; therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it to you" (John 16:13-15).

The role of The Holy Spirit in shaping us into Christ's image was discussed in the previous chapter, particularly in the reference to 2 Corinthians 3:18. The Holy Spirit is the primary agent and the primary instrument is the written Word of God. To become like Jesus we must open our Bibles and feast on the riches of Christ, looking to The Holy Spirit to give us good spiritual "digestion" and assimilation.

Years ago I was driving up one of the streets of Oregon City, Oregon, when I noticed a sign on a restaurant. It read, "Consume mass quantities." I thought, "That would be a good label for people to place on their Bibles."

We remind ourselves of the saying, "As we as the children of God look into the Word of God, the Spirit of God transforms us into the image of the Son of God."

The Holy Spirit does not call attention to Himself. He focuses our attention on Jesus Christ. He instructs us to look to Jesus, "the author and perfecter of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2).

"Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess" (Hebrews 3:1 NIV).

Fellow believers are also very active agents in discipling us into the image of Christ. Jesus commissioned His followers, "Go therefore and disciple all nations" (Matthew 28:19). People who forsake the assembling of themselves together (Hebrews 10:25) are missing a vital and necessary resource for their own spiritual growth and maturity, as well as a prime opportunity to give positive input into other believers to help them grow.

In concluding this chapter, let us listen to the words of Jesus, recorded in John 18:37. "Every one who is of the truth hears my voice."

Are you "of the truth?" Are you a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, hearing His voice and following Him?

Let us do so, and learn from Him.

In this learning process we are not bringing together the entire body of Divine revelation on each subject. That is, we are not studying everything the Bible says about each one. All truth is in Christ, and in the ultimate sense the entire Bible is the word of Christ. Nevertheless, our focus here is specifically on what we learn from Jesus Himself as the Word made flesh, by what He said and what He did.

Also, it is not our purpose here to bring together everything that Jesus taught on every subject. Our Lord spoke about the new birth, His own deity, marriage, stewardship, The Scriptures, His own death and resurrection, The Holy Spirit, evangelism, the kingdom of God, and the future, plus other subjects. Furthermore, in exploring our Lord's parables we discover a wealth of truth, much of it bearing directly on God's purposes in us and for us. Here we are focusing on what we learn from Jesus that cultivates the formation of His character, principles, attitudes, personality, and behavior in those who love Him.

CHAPTER THREE:

WE LEARN LOVE

The most important virtue that we learn from Jesus is *love*. God's whole moral character is summed up in love (1 John 4:8). That total love is fully revealed in our Lord Jesus Christ.

We reflect back on the words of the apostle Paul in Ephesians 3:17-19. "That you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ, which passes knowledge."

Real love—the "God-kind" of love—is a set of the soul, a commitment of the will. It is not merely a feeling, though it does produce feelings. Sometimes it demonstrates its greatest strength when no "warm fuzzy" feelings accompany it, or even more so when strong contrary feelings are present. We can truly love someone even when we might feel like "wringing their neck." And so we learn from Jesus to love even our enemies (Matthew 5:43-48).

First Corinthians chapter 13 describes real love. Real love suffers long and is kind; it does not envy; it is not boastful, proud, or selfish; it does not keep score of wrongs; it delights not in evil but in the truth; it bears, believes, hopes, and endures all things; it never fails.

As God's moral character is summed up in love, just so all morality is likewise summed up in love. Every virtue is love in action.

Many people fail to understand this fundamental point. Some say, "God is a God of justice as well as a God of love." That puts God's justice outside of His love as something antithetical to love itself. It implies that in the exercise of justice, including the execution of the penalty for sin, God is somehow not acting in the best interests of the universe. That is not true.

It *is* correct to say that God is a God of justice as well as a God of mercy, because both justice and mercy are actions of love—God's commitment to the highest good—although in different ways and circumstances. Mercy triumphs over justice when mercy is shown without violating justice (James 2:13. See Romans 3:23 - 26).

Again, every virtue is love in action. That is why Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love. On the twin commandments to love God supremely and others as ourselves "hang all the law and the prophets" (Matthew 22:40). And Romans 13:10 says that "love is the fulfilling of the law."

Where love is present, all virtue is present. Where love is not present, there is no virtue at all.

Without love, so-called "righteousness" is nothing more than the cold, hard legalism practiced by the Pharisees, ancient and modern. It is proud, stern, merciless and cruel. That was not the heart of our Savior.

From Jesus we learn God's love for souls. When Jesus encountered the rich young ruler, the Lord focused His attention on him and loved him (Mark 10:21). That love was a decision to make a sincere effort to bring about a change of heart in the young man. Jesus loved him—loved him enough to tell him the truth, even though he would reject it and walk away.

The tenderness of our Lord's love is demonstrated in His attitudes and actions toward children. Isaiah prophesied about this beautiful quality of Christ's love. "He shall feed his flock like a shepherd; he shall gather the lambs with his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young" (Isaiah 40:11).

This is exactly what Jesus did. When they brought young children to Him, "He took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them" (Mark 10:16).

His attitudes and actions toward children were a stark contrast to those of the cultures of that day, and most cultures since. In cultures where the love of Christ is significantly present and has had a profound influence on the values of the people, the worth of children is recognized and upheld.

Jesus loved children, and they loved Him. They were drawn to Him by the divine magnet of love. On at least one occasion He had to push aside the insensitivity of His own disciples to make way for the children.

And so we learn from Jesus how to treat children. Love will never reject or abuse them. Someone has said, "If children don't like to be around you, you need a prayer meeting."

Compassion is another beautiful expression of love that was prominent in Jesus. "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them... (Matthew 9:36). "And Jesus went forth and saw a great multitude, and was moved with compassion toward them, and he healed their sick" (Matthew 14:14).

Jesus was thoughtfully aware of the needs and sufferings of the people, and He acted appropriately to meet those needs and end those sufferings. No doubt

Jesus experienced emotions, and He certainly acted. What is most important to understand is that the action did not spring from mere emotion, as is the case with so much so-called "compassion." Christ's compassion toward the people flowed out of the deep commitment of His soul.

At times love motivated Jesus to become effectively involved in the needs of others in a specific way and for the immediate situation. This is the practical action of love that He illustrated in the Parable of the Good Samaritan. Take care of the need; provide adequate resources; follow up if necessary; and leave it at that.

We can do that in what are called secondary relationships. Primary relationships (for example, marriage, family, church) require long-term commitments that are exercised in varying degrees from time to time as needs require.

The well-known story of the pig and the hen illustrates the difference between primary and secondary relationships. The pig and the hen were walking down a country road. Soon they came by the house of a very poor family. The hen said to the pig, "Let's get involved in the need. How about providing them a breakfast of ham and eggs? I'll provide the eggs, and you provide the ham." The pig replied, "For you that is involvement; but for me that is total commitment."

Usually love calls only for practical involvement. At times it demands total commitment. Jesus said, "Greater love has no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). Jesus was applying this to Himself and His impending ultimate sacrifice for us on the cross. In the sacrificial death of our Lord Jesus Christ we see displayed the fullest extent of total, self-sacrificing love.

"Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end" (John 13:1). That is, He loved them to the fullest extent, or as some would say, He loved them "to the max." By this we know love (1 John 3:16).

This is the same love that motivates all who have received the love of God into their hearts. In Galatians 2:20 the apostle Paul expressed it this way. "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." Christ's redeeming love toward Paul was the dynamic driving force behind his Christ-centered life. So it is with every genuine Christian.

The love that we see revealed in Jesus and that we learn from Him asks not, "What can God do for me?" but "What can I do for God?" It does not ask, "How much do I have to do to be a Christian?" but "How much *can* I do because I *am* a

Christian?"

The love demonstrated in Jesus is the basis for the "new commandment." It is the standard of our love for one another. He said, "As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love. These things I have spoken to you, that My joy may remain in you, and that your joy may be full. This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you" (John 15:9-11).

This love is "true in Him and in you" (1 John 2:8).

We are to "walk in love, as Christ has loved us" (Ephesians 5:2). "As" here means "just as," "exactly as." No less.

We learned it from Him.

CHAPTER FOUR: WE LEARN HUMILITY AND OBEDIENCE

When Jesus invited us to come to Him, learn from Him, and find rest to our souls, He included this statement, "For I am meek and lowly in heart" (Matthew 11:29).

Jesus promised that the meek shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). And Jesus certainly is our greatest example of meekness, as the apostle Peter reminds us. "For what credit is there if, when you sin and are harshly treated, you endure it with patience? But if when you do what is right and suffer for it you patiently endure it, this finds favor with God. For you have been called for this purpose, since Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example for you to follow in His steps" (1 Peter 2:20, 21 NASB).

So humility expresses itself in meekness, steadfastness in the face of opposition, forbearance in the face of provocation, and longsuffering under adverse conditions and circumstances.

As the saying goes, "Meekness is not weakness; it is strength under discipline."

Also, lowliness in heart—that is, humility—is not thinking negatively about one's self. Humility takes a realistic view of one's self. It is a willingness to be known and appreciated for exactly who and what we are, no more and no less. And it is not so self-concerned that it becomes frustrated and self-assertive if people do not readily recognize our talents and status. Humble people are secure in themselves, knowing their strengths but also aware of their weaknesses and limitations.

Humility expresses itself in gentleness, and also in condescension in the good sense of a willingness to reach down to the guilty, the needy, and the suffering to assist them and lift them up. It is the very opposite of the place-seeking that Jesus condemned in Luke 14:7-14.

It is commonly asserted that the moment we become aware of our humility, we lose it. Along this line, the story is told of a man who was awarded a button for humility; then they took it away from him because he wore it!

Virtues are moral choices. They are conscious acts of the will. Because it is a virtue, humility is a moral choice, a conscious act of the will. We are under moral obligation to be humble (1 Peter 5:5, 6), and we know whether or not we are obeying that command. Jesus knew that He had chosen to be humble, and He invites us to learn from Him.

In Matthew 18 Jesus made it clear that we must humble ourselves as a little child even to enter the kingdom. In other words, humility is the entry level into the kingdom of God. In the event recorded in Matthew 18, Jesus called a little child to come to Him. The child obeyed without hesitation, yielding his will to Jesus in total trust. That was humility in action. It still is.

God appeals to us by His own moral qualities, and one of those qualities is humility. If God were not humble, He would not be virtuous. God "humbles Himself to behold the things that are in heaven and in earth" (Psalm 113:6). God is not proud. This concept of God is foreign to the natural mind. Man creates "gods" that are proud and aloof, completely devoid of humility, meekness, and condescension. The very idea of God being humble is incomprehensible to them. But in Jesus Christ God revealed this beautiful quality of His character. God in Christ was born in a stable, had no place to lay His head, ate with sinners, rode on a donkey's colt, washed His disciples' feet, did not return the insults of those who reviled Him but prayed for their forgiveness; then died for us on a cross.

No one is too low for Him to stoop down to. Who are we, then, to boast and exalt ourselves? Let us learn from Him.

Philippians 2:5-11 is one of the richest and most profound passages in the divinely inspired Word of God. "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (NIV). Some versions more precisely translate "emptied Himself" (verse 7). That is, He laid aside the prerogatives and privileges of His deity, holding them in abeyance during the time of His humanity on earth.

Verse 8 records that Jesus Christ, the Second Person of the eternal Trinity humbled Himself. This is certainly by far and beyond comprehension the greatest act of humility of all time and eternity!

That act was expressed in Christ's obedience to The Father, as verse 8 declares. "He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!

Hebrews 5:8 says, "Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the

things which he suffered" (KJV). This does not mean that Jesus was ever disobedient and had to learn to obey. He always obeyed the Father. It means that as the Son of Man, part of His "self-emptying" was His willingness to go through and thus learn the *human* experience of obeying the Father in daily life, just as we must do. He walked our path, and He walked it flawlessly.

Christ's humble obedience became our example, our template. Just before His ultimate act of obedience on the cross, Jesus said to His disciples (and us), "If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide in His love" (John 15:10).

If the very Son of God deemed it a necessity to obey the Father as a condition of remaining in the Father's love, and told us that we must do the same in order to remain in His love, what shall we say of those careless souls who regard obedience to God as an option and treat the Word of God as though it had little or no authority over them?

"Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus" Philippians 2:5 instructs us. And 1 Corinthians 2:16 affirms that as believers we have the mind of Christ. That is, His thinking has become our thinking, His values our values, His motives our motives, in all of life and in all of the relationships of life.

Looking again at Philippians 2:7 we read that Jesus took upon Himself the form, the very nature, of a servant. He stated clearly that He had not come to be served, but to serve (Matthew 20:28). He told His disciples that, even though He was the greater, He was among them as the one who served (Luke 22:27); and that they were to follow His attitude and example. He went even further and demonstrated this principle of servanthood by washing His own disciples' feet, and explaining why He did it (John 13:1-17).

"We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, 'The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me'. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus; that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Romans 15:1-7 KJV).

"For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich" (2 Corinthians 8:9 KJV).

"Now I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ..."
(2 Corinthians 10:1 KJV).

Humility, obedience, servanthood—each follows the other just as the stem comes from the roots and the flower emerges from the stem. It is a divine continuum, like a fountain springing forth from the earth and flowing out to bring life and blessing wherever it goes.

We learn it from Jesus.

CHAPTER FIVE: WE LEARN HOLINESS

The essential act of obedience to God is to leave sin alone. Without purity of heart and life no relationship with God is possible. Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8).

Saving faith purifies the heart (Acts 15:9), works by love (Galatians 5:6), and overcomes the world (1 John 5:4, 5). That is the faith through which we were saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8). It is the faith that puts us into grace. Any so-called "faith" that does not purify the heart will not save the soul.

One of the essential truths that we learn from our Lord Jesus Christ is that sin is absolutely inexcusable and intolerable. Centuries before the Son of God came to earth in the flesh, the psalmist declared of Him, "You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions" (Psalm 45:7). This is reaffirmed in Hebrews 1:9.

Jesus loved righteousness and hated sin. He lived righteously because He loved righteousness; He left sin alone because He hated it. That is the basic requirement for overcoming sin and living a life of purity and holiness.

Jesus overcame sin. Day by day and moment by moment He lived in constant victory over temptation. He lived in total moral freedom because He never allowed temptation to defeat Him and bring Him under bondage to sin. Jesus "was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15).

As the Son of Man, Jesus was just as human as we are. He had every susceptibility to temptation that we have. The world, the flesh, and the devil were the sources of temptation to Jesus, just as they are to us. And He overcame them all. He overcame them as the fully human Son of Man. He did not draw on His deity to overcome temptation. Had He done so, He would have had an ontological advantage over us in dealing with it. But He did not. Jesus overcame sin by the same all-sufficient resources of divine grace that are available to all of us.

God commands us, "Be holy, for I the Lord your God am Holy" (Leviticus 19:2; 1 Peter 1:16).

Someone might retort, "Sure, God! It's easy for you to say that. But come and live where I live and fight the things I have to battle."

That is exactly what God did in Jesus Christ. And He overcame it all as a human being, just like you and me. And, having done so, by the Holy Spirit through the apostle Peter He reaffirms His command for us to be holy because He is holy.

Jesus "condemned sin in the flesh" (Romans 8:3). That is, in His own flesh—His own humanity—He condemned the sin of mankind. By overcoming sin as a real human being—in the flesh—Jesus proved by demonstration that sin is not an unavoidable necessity, and therefore it is inexcusable. He condemned it. Jesus put the lie to the common excuse, "Well, I'm only human."

Unlike so many people today, Jesus did not treat sin as though it were a trifle, something beyond our control, a tragic accident that happened to us. Although we suffer because of our sins and also the sins of others, we are not the victims of our own sin. We are its cause and its perpetrators.

Jesus is "holy, harmless, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens" (Hebrews 7:26 KJV). This does not mean that Jesus was detached or aloof from sinners. On the contrary, He came to save sinners. He was accused of being a friend of sinners (Matthew 11:19). Jesus loved people. He ate with sinners. He fully engaged the culture around Him, getting into people's lives, their homes, their needs, sometimes their faces, and also into their hearts. Nevertheless, Jesus never participated in their sins. He was proactively engaged and at the same time proactively separated. He was in the world, but not of the world.

This is a vital truth that The Scriptures insist that we learn from our Lord Jesus Christ. "The night is almost gone, and the day is at hand. Let us therefore lay aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and jealousy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to its lusts" (Romans 13:12-14 NASB). Carefully consider also Ephesians 4:17-24.

Christ's call to discipleship, "Follow me," is a call to forsake sin. If we are truly His disciples, we have learned from Him the absolute necessity of purity of heart and life; and we learned it from the very "get go." It was one of the very first lessons we learn in "Christianity 101." We, too, will love righteousness and hate sin.

CHAPTER SIX:

WE LEARN FORGIVENESS

If sin were a mere trifle, a force beyond our control, a "spiritual disease" or misfortune that came on us without our knowledge or consent; then God's forgiveness would be at best a "wink" at minor human weakness, or at worst an obligation on His part to rescue us helpless victims. In fact, it is neither.

The truth is that we are fully and personally responsible for our sin. We cannot blame it on someone else or something else. That is what makes sin so blameworthy and the guilt of the sinner so great. It also makes Divine forgiveness such a marvelous act of grace and mercy.

God is most willing and eager to forgive. It is part of his moral nature, His character. Jesus Christ did not come to make God willing to forgive; God's willingness to forgive is the reason Jesus came. God's purpose in giving us Jesus Christ was to make forgiveness possible under the moral government (rule) of God.

In Jesus Christ we see the forgiving heart of God in full display. Jesus said to the contrite woman who had been caught in the act of adultery, "Neither do I condemn you; go and sin no more" (John 8:11).

To the paralytic He declared, "Man, your sins are forgiven you" (Luke 5:20). Even on the cross He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34).

Yes, from Jesus we learn forgiveness, both by precept and by example.

The model prayer that Jesus gave us includes this important petition and its equally important condition. "And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.... For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matthew 6:12, 14, 15).

Jesus said, "Forgive, and you will be forgiven" (Luke 6:37). He also instructs us, "Take heed to yourselves. If your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times in a day returns to you, saying, 'I repent,' you shall forgive him" (Luke 17:3, 4).

In Matthew 18:21-35 The Scriptures record the major lesson Jesus gave the disciples (and us) on forgiveness. Peter had just asked Jesus how many times

he should forgive his brother when his brother repeatedly sinned against him. Peter asked Jesus if seven times was the limit, thinking that was a generous suggestion.

The Lord's reply must have shocked them all. "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven" (verse 22).

Then Jesus gave them a parable about a servant who had been forgiven an astronomical debt he owed to his king, but who in turn refused to forgive his fellow-servant a mere pittance by comparison. When the king found out, he called the ungrateful wretch and nullified the entire transaction, because the conditions of forgiveness were absent.

Jesus followed the parable immediately with this sobering warning: "So My heavenly Father also will do to you if each of you, from his heart, does not forgive his brother his trespasses" (verse 35).

The point of the parable is this: Because God's forgiveness toward us is so great and unlimited, how can we put a limit on our forgiveness of others? If we forgive someone 490 times, we might just as well go ahead and forgive the 491st time also; otherwise, the other 490 times were practically wasted.

In Mark 11:25 and 26 Jesus directly linked prayer and forgiving others. "And whenever you stand praying, if you have anything against anyone, forgive him, that your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses. But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father in heaven forgive your trespasses."

So Jesus made it clear that our forgiveness toward others is a condition and also a measure of God's forgiveness to us. This has nothing to do with God's willingness to forgive. It means simply that mercy parallels mercy. The two are linked. They are like two meshed gears. The gear of God's great mercy to us drives the gear of our mercy to others. If we lock the gear of our mercy and forgiveness to others, we lock *both* gears. The love of God toward us and in us keeps both gears moving.

The love of God that motivates Him to forgive us becomes in us the driving force behind our willingness to forgive others. Not only that, it is also the *standard* of that forgiveness.

"And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you" (Ephesians 4:32 KJV).

"Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye" (Colossians 3:13 KJV).

We notice the standard of forgiveness in both of these "twin" passages. In the Greek it is not merely "as," but the stronger "even as," that is, with the same willingness and in the same measure.

We all need God's forgiveness. In view of the greatness and the urgency of that universal need, and the fact that to be forgiven we must forgive, we cannot afford to harbor any unforgiveness toward anyone, even for a moment.

One word of caution. Although our forgiveness toward others is a *condition* of receiving God's forgiveness for ourselves, it is not the *basis* of His forgiveness. "Forgive, and you will be forgiven" does *not* mean "forgive, and you have earned or merited forgiveness." It means that we have removed the obstacle in our own hearts.

The *basis* of our forgiveness is God's love and grace given to us in Jesus Christ as a free gift, received through faith and not by any works of our own.

So if there is a phone call to be made, an e-mail to be sent, a letter to be written, a personal visit to be arranged, let's not delay. Let's do it now. Let's set the mighty earthly and heavenly gears in motion and see the liberating, transforming results!

CHAPTER SEVEN: WE LEARN PRAYERFULNESS

In the predawn darkness a lone figure moved silently through the streets, past the edge of town, and out into a solitary place. People were still asleep, including His disciples. But not for long. Soon Peter and his companions would be up and tracking Him down with their intrusive message, "Everyone is looking for you" (Mark 1:37 NIV).

But now He had to pray. At that moment the need for prayer was greater than the need for sleep. Jesus felt the urgency to be alone with the Father. He could not face the demands of the day without that energizing communion.

Prayer—deep, extended, lingering time in the presence of God—was a necessity to Jesus. At times when the crowds were the largest and the demands of ministry were the heaviest, He withdrew to lonely places to pray.

One of those times is recorded in Luke 5:15, 16. "Great multitudes came together to hear, and to be healed by him of their infirmities. And he withdrew himself into the wilderness, and prayed" (KJV).

As a man Jesus had tremendous stamina. At times He prayed all night and then plunged into a day-long agenda of preaching, teaching, and healing the sick. He prayed all night before choosing the 12 disciples (Luke 6:12). After feeding the 5,000 He sent the disciples away by boat and went up into a mountain to pray, walking back to them on the water in the fourth watch of the night (Mark 6:46-48).

Jesus is our example in all things—including prayer. If a well-established, consistent, on-going life of prayer was a vital necessity to the Son of Man, it most certainly is to us. Jesus Christ had to live in prayer, and so do we. Prayer is as essential to us as breathing.

Our Lord's praying was not always peaceful and serene. At times He prayed "with loud cries and tears" (Hebrews 5:7 NIV). Jesus knew the depth of intercessory prayer, an exercise in spiritual labor and travail that many Christians today have never experienced or even imagined.

We hear Jesus pray in the Garden of Gethsemane: "Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done" (Luke 22:42 NIV). Here intense intercession was coupled with total submission.

During that experience He said to His disciples, "Get up and pray so that you

will not fall into temptation" (Luke 22:46 NIV).

Prayer was essential to Jesus because He knew it was effective. At the tomb of Lazarus He affirmed to the Father, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. I knew that you always hear me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that you sent me" (John 11:41, 42 NIV).

At the time of His arrest Jesus assured sword-wielding Peter: "Do you think I cannot call on my Father, and he will at once put at my disposal more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53 NIV).

Jesus continued His intercessory praying even while on the cross: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" (Luke 23:34 NIV). The prophet had foretold that He would make intercession for the transgressors. (See Isaiah 53:12).

Jesus did not shrink from the prayer of questioning: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matthew 27:46 NIV). Nevertheless, this prayer was followed by one of quiet resignation: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit" (Luke 23:46 NIV).

Many of Jesus' prayers focused on His disciples—and on us. His great high-priestly prayer, recorded in John 17, is a paramount example. There He prayed for all believers that the Father would keep us through His own name (verse 11); keep us from the evil one (verse 15); sanctify us through the truth, His word (verse 17). He also prayed that we all will be one (verse 21), and that we will be with Him and behold His glory (verse 24).

Jesus told Peter, "Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail" (Luke 22:31, 32 NIV). In the end Peter's faith did not fail. Jesus had prayed for him. That made the difference.

Today Jesus Christ is alive. He is in heaven at the right hand of the Father. And He is still praying for us (Romans 8:33, 34).

Jesus taught us the necessity of prayer both by example and by precept. In His model prayer for His disciples (Matthew 6:9-11), He established the true pattern of priorities. Our first concern is to be for the honor of God and His name, the establishment of His kingdom, and the accomplishment of His will on earth. After that present our own needs, temporal and spiritual.

Many people reverse the two and then wonder why their prayers are not answered.

In the Parable of the Persistent Friend, recorded in Luke 11:1-13, and also in

the Parable of the Insistent Widow, recorded in Luke 18:1-8, Jesus taught us the importance of persistence in prayer. Although each parable has its own emphasis, both carry the same basic message: If you have a petition, *keep on praying*. Don't give up!

Both parables focus on the character of God, and both use a contrast to illuminate His character. God never sleeps, and He is always just.

First, let's look at the scene in Luke 11. It is the middle of the night. A traveler arrives at the house of a friend. Custom and courtesy demand that the guest be fed, but the host is out of bread.

Where can he get bread at this time of the night? Oh, yes, a friend down the street *always* has bread. So he goes to his door and knocks.

"Lend me three loaves," he asks.

Sure enough, the friend has the loaves, but he refuses to disturb his children who are sleeping around him.

"Stop giving me trouble," he orders.

But the man at the door will not leave. "Look, friend, I need bread," he says. "You have bread. I'm not taking no for an answer. If you don't wake up the kids, / will—and probably the whole neighborhood!"

"Importunity" is what the Bible calls it. Overly persistent. Troublesomely urgent. Today we call it just plain *gall*.

He got his loaves, not because of friendship but because of persistence.

And he got all three. He did not reduce the request to one or two. That would have made no difference. If we are going to be persistent, let's go all the way. Make waking up the children worthwhile!

Then Jesus said to the disciples, "And I say to you, ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Luke 11:9, 10). If you do not receive immediately, keep praying. This is the lesson Jesus is teaching us in the Parable of the Persistent Friend.

Now, God is not like the man in that house. Our Father never sleeps. He is always eager to give. So then, if persistence got what it wanted from a sleepy-eyed friend, how much more will our loving, generous Father in heaven give His children what they need! Ask...until we receive. Seek...until we find.

Knock...until the door opens.

Then Jesus approached it from another direction. He told about a mistreated widow who came to a corrupt judge for justice. She had no money for a bribe, and no social or political leverage, but she cried, "Avenge me!"

The judge figured if he just ignored her, she would go away and leave him alone. But he underestimated the woman. She had one weapon—insistence—and she aimed it at his desire for ease.

She kept coming back until at last he gave in. The widow got what she came for, and she did it by sheer insistence. She wanted justice, and she refused to be denied!

In both parables Jesus used a sharp contrast to highlight the character of God. Our heavenly Father is the very opposite of that judge. Also, He is not like a sleepy, reluctant friend.

Jesus taught us several principles about prayer. He taught us such things as: not to show off to others or use vain repetitions when we pray (Matthew 6:5-7); to pray in faith (Mark 24); to forgive others as we pray (Mark 11:25); to ask in His name (John 14:13, 14); to abide (remain) in Him (John 15:7).

As a result of His communion with the Father, Jesus experienced a deep settled peace. Even when people and situations ruffled His surface emotions, the deep peace of His soul remained. His disciples must have noticed this remarkable characteristic of our Lord and admired it. That is why His promise meant so much to them when He said, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you" (John 14:27 KJV). This is true peace, and we learn it from Jesus.

All through His earthly life, Jesus focused on His relationship with the Father. And He taught us to do likewise. That is why when Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to His word, the Lord said, "Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her" (Luke 10:42 NASB).

Let us learn from Jesus, and do likewise.

CHAPTER EIGHT:

WE LEARN JOY

Years ago it was often said that Jesus never smiled. I hope that is one misconception about our Lord that has been permanently laid to rest.

For certain Jesus was a serious-minded, no-nonsense person. And in reference to His sufferings, He is described as "a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief" (Isaiah 53:3).

Notwithstanding, Jesus was also full of joy. He rejoiced (exulted) in spirit (Luke 10:21). We remember the words addressed to Jesus in Psalm 45:7 and reaffirmed in Hebrews 1:9, "You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions."

While walking along with His disciples on the way to Gethsemane on His countdown to His horrible sufferings and death on the cross, Jesus assured them, "These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full" (John 15:11 KJV).

Now, if Jesus had not lived a life of great joy and had not expressed that joy around His disciples, those words would have had no meaning or value whatever to them. Who would get excited over the prospect of experiencing the same level of joy in life as a human "rain cloud?"

Christ's words must have aroused a sense of anticipation. What He was saying to them was going to bring them full joy, joy just like His! That should have given them a very positive view of their future.

Why? Because they had been with Jesus through the years of His earthly ministry and had seen the high level of His joy.

Jesus "went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed by the devil" (Acts 10:38 KJV). He did it all out of deep, intense love. And love fulfilled brings joy. Can anyone imagine Jesus healing people, bringing wholeness and "life more abundantly" to them, without Himself feeling and expressing great joy right along with them?

The gospel accounts do not give us the details of everything Jesus did. Sometimes we read only summary statements like Acts 10:38. Matthew 4:24 records, "And they brought to Him all sick people who were afflicted with various diseases and torments, and those who were demon-possessed, epileptics, and

paralytics; and He healed them." In Matthew 8:16 we read, "When evening had come, they brought to Him many who were demon-possessed. And He cast out the spirits with a word, and healed all who were sick" (NKJV).

Likewise, Luke mentions one occasion when a great crowd gathered around Jesus to hear Him and to be healed of their diseases. "And the whole multitude sought to touch Him, for power went out from Him and healed them all" (Luke 6:19).

All of these occasions and many more must have brought abundant joy to Jesus. His ministry must have filled Him with continual joy.

The Bible does give us some specific examples. The raising of the widow's son at Nain is one of them (Luke 7:11-15). Jesus saw the funeral procession and looked at the weeping, widowed mother as she followed the body of her only son to its grave. Compassion welled up within Him. So He stopped the funeral procession, touched the coffin, and commanded the young man to arise.

Imagine the scene, the excitement, the tears of joy, as Jesus dramatically presented the young man alive and well to his mother! Imagine the joy that Jesus Himself must have felt and must have demonstrated in full view of His disciples!

After Jesus brought "the water of life" to the woman at the well in Samaria, He said to His disciples, "I have food to eat that you do not know about" (John 4:32 NASB).

We noticed (Luke 10:21) that Jesus exulted in spirit because the Father was making the truth come alive in the spiritual "babes" who were listening intently to Him, even though the "wise and prudent" were not "getting it."

The disciples had seen Jesus express a full range of human emotions in His life and the various experiences of His ministry, *including joy to the full!* That is why His statement to them that night on the way to Gethsemane meant so much to them. So also did His great high-priestly prayer that same night, including this part: "These things I speak in the world, that they might have my joy fulfilled in themselves" (John 17:13 KJV).

Jesus Christ even went through the ordeal of His crucifixion victoriously, enduring the cross and despising the shame, because He fixed His attention on "the joy that was set before Him" just beyond that experience (Hebrews 12:2).

Jesus lived a life full of joy. He brought us joy; and that in turn brought joy to Him. We find joy in Him. We learn joy from Him.

It is not by accident that in the list of the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22, 23), love is first and joy follows next. Joy follows love because love produces joy. Abundant love brings abundant joy. If we love God supremely and others as ourselves, we are happy when they are happy. Their joy becomes our joy.

Pity those poor, shriveled up souls who love themselves supremely. They have bought into the lie that if you want to find joy and happiness, you must make it your goal and pursue it for yourself. That false philosophy deludes so many millions and deprives them of the very joy and happiness they desperately seek.

What we learn from Jesus is that if you want real joy, stop pursuing it for yourself. Let Jesus Christ come into your heart and establish His love there. Love what He loves. Pursue what He pursues. Love God with all your heart and others as yourself. Bring joy and happiness to God and to others, and you will have joy in full measure yourself without even seeking it.

A children's chorus expresses it so well:

"Jesus and others and you,
what a wonderful way to spell 'joy.'
Jesus and others and you,
in the heart of each girl and each boy.
"J is for Jesus, for He has first place.
"O is for others we meet face to face.
"Y is for you, and whatever you do,
put yourself last and spell JOY."

Jesus wants our joy to be no less than His own. For that to happen, we must first love Him and find joy in the things that brought Him joy.

CHAPTER NINE:

WE LEARN ZEAL

We know very little about the childhood and early adult years of Jesus. Some fanciful stories have been created from time to time in an attempt to fill in this "gap" in the narrative. But the actual historical record does not address those years in the earthly life of our Lord. The reason is that they are not essential to the gospel—Christ's person, His teaching, and His redemptive work.

What we do know has been revealed to us because it is directly relevant to His person and His mission on earth. That is, His miraculous virgin birth and the events surrounding it are vital to who He is, and why and how He came. They are essential to our knowledge and understanding of Him.

All that is said about Jesus in the years immediately following His birth is contained in the concise and comprehensive statement recorded in Luke 2:40, "And the Child grew and became strong in spirit, filled with wisdom; and the grace of God was upon Him." From this we get a picture of a boy who was *all* boy—full of life and energy, living each day to the hilt. Of course, all of this was tempered by the fact that He was also "filled with wisdom," and "the grace of God was upon Him."

The one inspired "snapshot" of Jesus at 12 years of age is recorded in Luke 2 in the passage following verse 40. The picture we see is a purposeful young man highly motivated by a definite awareness of who He is, with a strong determination to pursue His Heavenly Father's agenda.

Jesus' relationship with the Father was vital, firm and unshakable. He had His values correct, His priorities straight, His focus clear, and His energies properly and fully directed. This must have held true of Him through His teen years, His twenties, and throughout His earthly ministry and final triumph, all the time growing and maturing.

With these qualities resident in Him and growing with Him, the young Jesus of Nazareth could not have been a lazy person. There might have been times when His half-brothers thought He "wasted" time in devotional pursuits when they thought He should have been in the carpenter shop. How little they knew of Him and His deep zeal for those realities that they hardly knew existed. Besides, a person of His deep sense of obligation would not neglect the ordinary duties of life.

Sometimes we hear it said that some people are "so heavenly minded they are of no earthly good."

Silly cliché!

We have not met very many of those exclusively "heavenly minded" people. Being "too heavenly minded" is not one of the world's great problems. Yes, there are people who shut themselves within themselves and chant mantras; but that is being self-absorbed, not heavenly minded.

The truth is that if we are going to be of any real earthly good, we must first become truly heavenly minded. People whose motivation comes from the love of God are the ones who have the purest zeal for good on earth.

A lazy Christian is an oxymoron. If we love God we will be about our "Father's business," if we are able to function at all. We are zealous, and we see in Jesus our great example of zeal.

There was certainly nothing drab, colorless, passive, listless, or lazy about Jesus. He was not indifferent to His Father's honor nor to the needs about Him. The first time He cleansed the temple, His disciples remembered that it was written "The zeal—the fervor of love—for Your house will eat Me up" (John 2:17 Amplified; referring to Psalm 69:9).

Because of this incident and the fact that He cleansed the temple the second time (Mark 11:15-17), some people mis-label Jesus as a violent revolutionary. Thus they mis-judge Jesus or mis-use Him for their own ideological purposes.

Yes, Jesus overturned the tables and ordered the money-changers and dove merchants to take their sacrilegious activities out of the temple. But that was not violence against their persons. Jesus even allowed them to take their property with them. He made a whip of "small cords," not to use on people but to move the sheep and oxen out of the temple. He had a right and an obligation to do this because He is greater than the temple (Matthew 12:6), and the Lord of the temple (Malachi 3:1).

Our Lord had tremendous "drive." His love mobilized His full energies and fired Him with holy zeal. We see these in the "I must" declarations of Jesus.

"I must be about my Father's business" (Luke 2:49).

"I must preach the gospel to other cities also" (Luke 4:43).

"I must work the works of Him who sent Me" (John 9:4).

"Zachaeus,... I must abide at your house" (Luke 19:5).

"Other sheep I have... them also I must bring" (John 10:16).

Jesus emphasized that He "must suffer many things, and be rejected... and be killed... and rise again" (Mark 8:31).

"I must." "I *must*." "I *MUST!*" These are the enormous motivating imperatives of love. We see them in their full display in Jesus and learn them from Him.

Our Lord "went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil" (Acts 10:38). Jesus put His entire inner resources into the work of the kingdom of God. And He called for the same commitment from His disciples. When Jesus Christ called the twelve, He did not go where idle loafers gathered and wasted their potential. Instead, He went to the places of activity. He called motivated, busy people, challenged them with possibilities beyond their cherished dreams and plans, and fired them with white hot zeal.

Oh, yes, the Lord had to get them under control. There was impetuous Peter, the one who had the sword and took a swipe at Malchus, the servant of the high priest. Lucky for Malchus that he ducked. Peter cut off his ear, but he was aiming a little lower. (Jesus restored Malchus' ear; wonder what He would have done had Peter cut off the man's head!)

And then there was Simon, the revolutionary zealot.

And, of course, we remember James and John, the "sons of thunder," who wanted to call down fire out of heaven and burn some people alive (Luke 9:54).

On occasions they argued among themselves about who was going to be the first in the kingdom, totally ignorant of what the kingdom is all about.

They were a lively bunch all right, but one thing is sure—there were no dead-heads among them! Eventually their zeal found its true motivation and became directed and disciplined.

The same was true of Paul. When Jesus arrested this rebel on the road to Damascus, the future apostle did not even "let up on the gas" or "hit the brake." In automotive parlance, he "popped a wheelie," and went full speed in the opposite direction in life. Jesus did not take one ounce of energy, determination, or zeal out of Saul (Paul). The Lord merely turned it all around and pointed it in the right direction.

Later, Paul wrote these inspired words: "not lagging in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord" (Romans 12:11). And he lived what he wrote.

Jesus was full of holy zeal because He was motivated by the love of God and energized by The Holy Spirit. Paul and the other apostles and early believers were filled with holy zeal for the same reason. And the same should be true of believers today. Anyone who is motivated by the love of God should be filled with a holy zeal to whatever each one's personal capacity might happen to be.

Zeal. We learn it from Jesus.

CHAPTER TEN:

WE LEARN THE ANOINTED LIFE

Luke records the day Jesus of Nazareth went to His local synagogue, opened the scroll of the prophet Isaiah, found the place that we now identify as Isaiah 61:1-3, and read as follows: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me to preach the gospel to the poor. He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to preach the acceptable year of the Lord" (Luke 4:18, 19).

Then Jesus made this astonishing announcement: "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing" (verse 21).

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He has anointed Me." To be anointed means literally to be "oiled," that is, consecrated and clothed with authority and power by the Holy Spirit.

We have already referred to the prophetic words addressed to Christ by the psalmist in Psalm 45:7 and repeated in Hebrews 1:9, "You love righteousness and hate wickedness; therefore God, Your God, has anointed You with the oil of gladness more than Your companions."

In this passage we note particularly that the anointing was an anointing of gladness (joy), and that it was conditioned on holiness. So it was then; so it still is today. It was true of Jesus; it is true of believers. Holiness is always essential to the joyful, anointed life.

Jesus lived the anointed life. Again we revisit Acts 10:38. "God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power, who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him" (KJV).

Jesus Christ was led by the Holy Spirit. He overcame the world, the flesh, and the devil by the power of the Holy Spirit. He returned from His temptation in the wilderness, "in the power of the Spirit" (Luke 4:14). By the anointing of the Holy Spirit, Jesus lived in faith and power, healed the sick, raised the dead, cast out devils, performed miracle after miracle, lived in full strength and complete victory. The anointing never left Him, even on the cross. It was "through the eternal Spirit" that He "offered Himself without spot to God" (Hebrews 9:14). And it was the Spirit of God who raised Him from the dead (Romans 8:11; 1 Timothy 3:16; 1 Peter 3:18).

Throughout our Lord's earthly ministry and for 40 days after His resurrection, He taught His disciples the dynamics of the anointed life, both by precept and by example. Jesus did what He saw His Father doing (John 5:19, 20; 8:38). And by so doing, He showed His disciples (and us) what the Father is doing so that they (and we also) would continue to do what the Father is doing.

In John chapters 14-16 Jesus specifically said that He would send the Holy Spirit to stay with us forever. The Holy Spirit would teach them all things and bring to their memory whatever He said to them (14:26). That is why in the gospels we have an accurate record of what Jesus said and did. The Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth and show them things to come (16:13). That is why the Acts of the Apostles, the epistles, and the Revelation are part of the canon of Scripture, the inerrant and authenticated Word of God.

The Holy Spirit would convince the world of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment (16:8-11). He would testify of Christ (15:26) and glorify Christ (16:14).

Now, early in His discourse Jesus declared emphatically that because He was going to the Father, "He that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do, because I go unto my Father" (14:12 KJV).

We notice that our Lord said, "He who believes on me." That definite promise was not restricted to any specific group of believers or any specific time. It is an age-long provision to all believers.

Jesus had already assured His disciples (and us) proleptically, "Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy, and nothing shall by any means hurt you" (Luke 10:19 KJV). At that time the disciples in their spiritual immaturity were so excited over the fact that demons were subject to them in His name that Jesus had to remind them that the greater cause for rejoicing is the fact that their names are written in heaven. Nevertheless, Christ's gift of the Holy Spirit is still ours.

It is understandable that after Christ's resurrection, His disciples would be full of questions. One question in particular burned within them: "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" (Acts 1:6 NIV). Jesus' response drew their attention away from that subject to a much more immediate one: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (verse 8 NIV).

Jesus lived in the full anointing of the Holy Spirit, and He intends for believers to do likewise. That is why He sent the Holy Spirit.

At the time of salvation, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in the believer (Romans 8:9). But there is more—much more. That is why we are commanded to be filled—continuously filled—with the Spirit (Ephesians 5:18).

Paul lived the anointed life; yet later in life he wrote, "That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection..." (Philippians 3:10 KJV). He yearned to know Christ in an even greater dimension of "the power of His resurrection."

So the anointed life is another of the spiritual dynamics that we learn from Christ in relationship with Him. In fact, all of the beautiful graces that we learn from Christ are learned and incorporated into our own character and lives out of our personal living relationship with Him. We produce the fruit of the Spirit only as we, the branches, stay in a vital relationship with Him, the Vine.

Are you "in Christ?" You cannot truly learn from Him unless you know Him; and to know Him you must be in a right relationship with Him. To come into a right relationship with Him you simply come to Him.

He invites you now, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (Matthew 11:28-30).

Then, in that personal relationship with Christ, "grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2 Peter 3:18 KJV).

