

The Equipping Process

STEP TWO

Disciplines

THE DISCIPLINES COURSE

Step Two of the Equipping Process

The Equipping Process...

The Equipping Process is a discipleship-training course consisting of four steps:

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| <u>STEP 1</u> FOUNDATIONS | <u>STEP 2</u> DISCIPLINES | <u>STEP 3</u> MINISTRY | <u>STEP 4</u> LEADERSHIP |
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The notes provided...

The notes provided in these courses are detailed in order to provide the learner with enough material to thoroughly study the concepts covered in this course. There is always more material added in the notes than what can be covered in the teaching sessions. We urge you to take the time to work through these notes carefully to ensure that you become established in Christ.

These notes make references to numerous Biblical passages. All Scripture references are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) unless otherwise noted.

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The principles and concepts that you are about to learn are essential for a solid, grounded life. Sadly too many Christians never learn to respond to the grace of God by nurturing these vital Biblical disciplines for effective living. These disciplines are essential in positioning us in relationship with God, and under the working of His Spirit to grow in spiritual maturity.

“If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit” (Galatians 5:25).

INTRODUCTION

In two passages, Paul captures the importance of discipline. The first passage reads...

“Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may obtain it. And everyone who competes for the prize is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a perishable crown, but we for an imperishable crown. Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified” (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

In using the analogy of a race, Paul compared the powerful, well-conditioned athletes of his day, admiring their commitment and dedication, with the need to be spiritually fit in order to fulfil our destiny. The word “**discipline**” in the phrase, “**I discipline my body**,” literally means, “to beat until black and blue,” and referred to Paul’s commitment and determination to keep his life under the government of the Holy Spirit. Discipline requires self-control and the practice of self-denial.

In a practical sense, God’s Word reveals certain ***spiritual disciplines or habits that every believer should embrace and develop in living a disciplined life***. We are going to examine the importance and application of each of the following spiritual disciplines:

- (1) The discipline of prayer.
- (2) The discipline of God’s Word.
- (3) The discipline of fellowship.
- (4) The discipline of giving.

Paul continues in a few chapters later...

“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10).

The lesson in this verse is crucial to grasp in our need to live a disciplined life. ***Discipline is a response to the grace of God***. Paul claimed that he was a product of the grace of God: “**by the grace of God I am what I am**”. He could take no personal credit for his spiritual growth and his spiritual effectiveness. He was not a self-made man, but a man grateful for all that God had enabled him to be and do.

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Yet, he never abused the grace of God: he did not take it for granted. Rather Paul worked hard at responding to the grace of God: **“His grace toward me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly”**. Grace is not an excuse for mediocrity, laziness and spiritual flabbiness. In fact, the opposite is true: God’s grace enables effective living!

The spiritual disciplines do **NOT**...

- increase God’s love for us.
- impress God more.
- earn God’s anointing.
- guarantee success.
- improve our own lives.
- make us better than others.

The spiritual disciplines are not a performance strategy, or a works mentality by which we follow a specific “A” to get the desired “B” we want. This would be to live under the law all over again, and miss the grace of God. Rather we must understand that the spiritual disciplines, or habits, are **the MEANS that God has designed for us to POSITION ourselves in His Presence**. Only the Holy Spirit can change us and conform us into Christ’s likeness, but exercising these disciplines places us on the operating table of the Master Surgeon. We can only be **“transformed into [His] image from glory to glory...by the Spirit of the Lord”** (2 Corinthians 3:18). Therefore it must be clear: God’s responsibility is to mature us, but our responsibility is to respond to His work through these spiritual disciplines.

Some myths regarding spiritual maturity...

- (1) Spiritual maturity does not happen accidentally or automatically; ***it happens intentionally***. You will remain a babe in Christ (which is not God’s will), unless you desire and devote yourself to spiritual growth (Hebrews 5:12-14).
- (2) Spiritual maturity does not happen in one spiritual experience or teaching, ***it happens over a process of experience and application***. You will not just “arrive” when you find the magic formula or key to success; growth takes place in faithfulness to the Lord and His dealings over time (see Philippians 3:10-14 and 2 Peter 3:17,18).
- (3) Spiritual maturity is not measured by what we know; ***it is revealed by our lifestyle and behaviour***: by how we live (see 1 Corinthians 8:1; 2 Peter 1:5-8 and Matthew 7:16-20).
- (4) Spiritual maturity is not a personal matter; ***it occurs in community***. What we do with our lives affects others whether we like it or not. God has designed us to need others and be needed by others. The Bible knows nothing of ‘solitary confinement’ Christianity (see Hebrews 10:24,25 and John 13:35).

DISCIPLINE ONE: “The Discipline of Prayer”.

(A) The definition of PRAYER.

(1) Prayer is communication.

(1.1) There are different kinds of prayer, such as adoration, intercession, supplication and confession, but prayer itself refers to the communication between two parties in an intimate relationship.

(1.2) Prayer is not just about asking God for His blessings, but seeking to be a blessing to Him! Prayer is our privilege as we communicate with our Father: sometimes talking, sometimes listening – but all the time loving!

(2) Prayer involves both times of prayer, and a lifestyle of prayer.

(2.1) Any healthy relationship requires one-on-one time. A time of prayer refers to those times in which we “**shut the door**” and “**pray to your Father who is in the secret place**” (Matthew 6:6). We call this a “devotional time” or a “prayer time”.

(2.2) Any healthy relationship requires a lifestyle of love. A lifestyle of prayer refers to walking in an awareness of God’s Presence, and an openness to His promptings: “**pray without ceasing**” (1 Thessalonians 5:17).

(B) A daily PRAYER time with God.

(1) Jesus Himself gave us the example of a daily prayer time (Mark 1:35; Luke 22:39), as did many of the heroes of the faith: for example, David (Psalm 145:2) and Daniel (Daniel 6:10).

(1.1) Every relationship needs quality one-on-one time, and so it is in our relationship with God. If a husband and wife do not have intimate personal time together, they will drift apart, no matter how much they see each other in the activity of a day.

(2) Jesus gave specific instructions on how to enjoy a daily prayer time (Matthew 6:6-13).

“[W]hen you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place...And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions...In this manner...pray: ‘Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your Kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors. And do not lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one...’”.

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(2.1) “...when you pray...” (v. 6).

- *This speaks of a regular daily time for prayer.*
- You need to decide on a specific time of the day that you can set aside for a regular ‘date’ with your Father. This time could be in the morning, sometime during the day or at night before bed. We do recommend that you follow the overwhelming example of the heroes of Scripture and find some time in the morning (see Mark 1:35; Psalm 63:1,2). There are so many advantages to this – and you do not need to be an “early-morning” person to do so. Like with all disciplines, it is a habit that you can learn.

(2.2) “...go into your room...” (v. 6).

- *This speaks of a specific place where you can escape the distractions or demands on your time: “**and when you have shut your door**”.*
- This is one main benefit to arising before the day gets going, before the phone can ring and before your mind has to engage in the details of the day ahead. You must find a specific place where you can meet with God “**in the secret place**”.

(2.3) “...do not use vain repetitions...In this manner, therefore, pray...” (v. 7-13).

- *This speaks of a clear guideline to aid us in our prayer.*
- Sadly, many have turned this guideline into a “**vain repetition**” reciting it by rote, rather than as the **guideline** it was meant to be. Jesus gives us this five-point guideline to supply us with just enough structure to guide and balance our prayer times. Too much structure turns prayer into a mechanical ritual, but ‘just enough’ helps us to avoid two problems of the undisciplined human nature:
 - *Distraction*: our minds often wander just when we start to pray. Everything that can possibly enter our mind does! A simple guideline enables us to remain focused.
 - *Drowsiness*: if our mind does not wander, it falls asleep! A simple guideline enables us to keep our concentration.

(C) Using the Lord's guideline in PRAYER.

(1) **ADORATION**: “Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name” (v. 9).

(1.1) Adoration refers to thanksgiving and praise.

(1.2) Prayer is not about just asking Him to meet our needs; *it is about meeting Him!* That is why Jesus said, “**your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him**” (v. 8). In other words, we leave your ‘shopping list’ of needs behind and draw near to Him in adoration.

(1.3) Through our thanksgiving and praise, God is enthroned and draws near to us (Psalm 22:3; 100:4,5). You may find it helpful to use worship music to facilitate this, or if you can play a musical instrument, even better. However, the best way to start this time is by reading through one Psalm each day, and looking for something in your reading to trigger your thanksgiving and praise. [Please see More on thanksgiving and praise under point (E) Adoration and Prayer].

(2) **INTERCESSION**: “Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth...” (v. 10).

(2.1) Intercession refers to praying for others.

(2.2) Notice, Jesus teaches us to first worship God (v. 9), then to pray for others (v. 10), and finally to pray for ourselves (vv. 11-13). And intercession is our privilege to share God’s heart and concern for others, praying that His Kingdom advance and His will be done. The best way to do this is to start praying for things furthest from you and work your way back to things closer to you. For example: start praying for issues that concern you in the world, especially for lost people (Matthew 9:38). Then move onto the country, especially for the government (1 Timothy 2:1-4). Next pray for your own town or city (2 Chronicles 7:14). Then pray for your church and any issues that you feel God brings to mind. Finally pray for your own sphere of influence; your family, friends, work and ministry.

(3) **SUPPLICATION**: “Give us this day our daily bread” (v. 11).

(3.1) Supplication, or petition, refers to praying for our own needs.

(3.2) God is interested in our needs! He encourages us to ask, seek and knock (Matthew 7:7-11). Bring your needs to the Father in faith knowing that He answers every prayer in one of three ways.

- Sometimes He answers, “No!” There are times when we ask for that which is not in line with His will, or we ask with the wrong motives (1 John 5:14, James 4:3).

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- Sometimes He answers “Wait!” There are times when we are not ready to receive that for which we ask. Remember: God is interested in our physical needs, but He is much more interested in our spiritual needs! There are times when the Father will withhold the provision if the provision will harm us.
- And sometimes He answers, “Yes!” – to which we are to respond with gratitude, humility and joy.

(4) **CONFESSIO**: “And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors” (v. 12).

- (4.1) Confession refers to allowing the Holy Spirit to cleanse our hearts.
- (4.2) Daily we should invite the Spirit of God to search our hearts. As we sin one at a time, so we should confess one at a time – general confessions are shallow. Let your prayer be, “**Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my anxieties; and see if there is any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting**” (Psalm 139:23,24). Then after confession we can arise from prayer with a clean heart and a fresh sense of His faithfulness (1 John 1:9). Remember that receiving His forgiveness is conditional on forgiving others (Matthew 6:14,15).

(5) **PROTECTION**: “lead us into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one” (v. 13).

- (5.1) Protection refers to seeking God’s wisdom and deliverance.
- (5.2) This verse literally means that we are to pray for God’s leading *through* temptation knowing that “**God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able**” (1 Corinthians 10:13). We are to pray for His wisdom in every situation (James 1:5) and for His protection on our lives, our loved ones, our homes and our possessions. (Psalm 91:9-16). From a daily time in prayer we can enter each day having discerned the “**wiles of the devil**” and neutralised his “**fiery darts**” (Ephesians 6:11,16) so that we can blaze a trail of victory before us!

(D) The length of a healthy PRAYER time.

- (1) Jesus challenged His disciples to an hour of prayer (Matthew 26:40), and it is generally accepted within the Spirit-filled church circles that a mature believer should ***aim at an hour of prayer daily***.
 - (1.1) However, please note: this is the aim of a mature believer. As you mature in the Lord, so you will find it easier and more enjoyable to spend longer time in prayer. Furthermore, it is normal for mature believers to experience seasons in which they

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spend an hour in prayer with ease, and then in other seasons struggle to enjoy a prayer time that tails off at around 40 minutes. The point is that we have a generally accepted goal to aim at.

- (1.2) Some may question the validity of talking about the amount of time in prayer. We are not suggesting that you watch the clock and keep track of time. But the reality is that it is necessary to budget time in the average person's busy schedule. *For unless you take time you will never find time!*
- (1.3) If you are a new believer, or even a Christian who has served the Lord a long time but have never disciplined yourself in this area before, let us suggest the following:
- After selecting a regular daily time and a specific place, *decide on a reasonable amount of time that you will set aside for prayer*. Let us suggest you that you aim at around 15 minutes.
 - While you have budgeted this time, do not watch the clock but *emphasise quality over quantity*. Delight yourself in the Lord in adoration, submitting to the Spirit as you use Jesus' prayer guideline.
 - *Be strict with yourself about guarding and keeping this time*. Do not let it be unnecessarily stolen from you or cramped out. If you set the alarm clock back 15 minutes, make sure do not just switch it off and then roll back to sleep. You can establish a new habit after just 30 days of repetition. So do not allow yourself to lapse by saying, "just this once I'll sleep in". The act of yielding weakens the will and reinforces your lack of self-control. However, if something necessary interferes then be sure to make use of what time that you do have. Always remember that any time with God is better than no time at all.
 - As you grow in your consistency and start beginning to find that you are outgrowing your set time, *re-budget you time*. Let us suggest that you aim now at 30 minutes. Your next aim after this may be the one-hour goal.
 - In the development of any discipline, *accountability increases the possibility of success a hundred times*. Ask a friend or leader to hold you accountable and to check up on you. Becoming accountable is not just practical advice but a spiritual investment that releases the power of God (Ecclesiastes 4:9,10).
 - Above all this practical advice that we have suggested, please remember this: God wants you to want to be with Him! If our prayer times become only about time management, we have sadly missed it.

(E) Adoration and PRAYER.

- (1) As we have seen, adoration is one aspect of prayer. But it is the foundational aspect in prayer (Matthew 6:9) and is the aspect of prayer most frequently used in the Bible.
- (2) Jesus used the word “**worship**” (Greek: *proskuneo*) very pointedly in His teaching:

“But...true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him” (John 4:23).

- (2.1) This word “**worship**” means, “to kiss toward”, and implies intimacy. The great privilege of the New Testament is that we are to “**draw near**” to enjoy intimacy with God in the confidence of Jesus’ completed work (Hebrews 4:15,16).
 - (2.2) Although another word is also used for “**worship**” (Greek: *latreau*), which refers to a lifestyle that brings God honour and glory (Romans 12:1; Philippians 3:3), this word that Jesus uses in John 4, expresses the level of intimacy with God that He in fact is “**seeking**”.
 - (2.3) This word “**worship**” – intimacy – then captures the essence of adoration in prayer.
- (3) The Bible outlines the means to enter God’s Presence in adoration.

“Enter into His gates with thanksgiving, and into His courts with praise” (Psalm 100:4).

- (3.1) This Psalm describes how God’s people approached the Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle of Moses, the place where God’s Presence dwelt (see Exodus 26). The people would enter the gates into the Tabernacle with **thanksgiving**, and then celebrate His Presence in the courts with **praise**. Finally, the high priest would enter the holy place on behalf of all the people.
- (3.2) This pattern speaks to us in the New Covenant with one awesome exception. Jesus, our High Priest, has made it possible for **all of us** – not just a priest – to “**come boldly to the throne of grace**” (Hebrews 4:16) because of the blood He has shed (vv. 14,15; also 9:11-14). “**Therefore...having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us**” (Hebrews 10:19,20). We can now enter His Presence in adoration, based on the shed blood of Jesus, using these guiding principles to “**enter**” God’s Presence:

□ **THANKSGIVING.**

Thanksgiving refers to expressing our gratitude to God for who He is to us and what He has done for us. For example, “Thank You Father for Your love and goodness”. This tunes our heart to God.

□ **PRAISE.**

Praise refers to declaring God's **goodness** and **greatness** (Psalm 150:2). For example, "Praise You Lord! Your love is amazing! You are wonderful and Your goodness knows no bounds!" This invites God to draw near to us.

(3.3) As we "**draw near**" through thanksgiving and praise, God responds by drawing near to us (James 4:8). Intimacy is enjoyed when we sense His nearness, and respond to Him with heartfelt desire and affection.

(4) Adoration is both a personal discipline, as part of our personal daily prayer time, and a corporate discipline as part of a local church.

(4.1) When we gather together as God's people, whether it is as a Home Church or in a Celebration service, **our Biblically declared reason for gathering is to worship Him!** Firstly, all we do – whether it is singing, teaching, ministry, giving, prayer or fellowship – should honour Him. Secondly, all we do are means to experience and enjoy Him intimately. Jesus' promised that when we gather: "**together in My name, I am there in the midst**" (Matthew 18:20).

(4.2) **Music** is a powerful means of facilitating our worship experience. Sadly for too many people worship simply means singing songs; but worship is not primarily a musical experience. In other words, worship is not singing, but singing can be worship. Prayerfully selected songs can facilitate the church gathering through thanksgiving, praise and to our goal: intimate experiences in His Presence.

The early church used the Lord's Supper as their primary expression of worship (Acts 2:42,46; 1 Corinthians 11:20,23-26), although music was used to some degree (Mark 14:26). As some time passed the benefit of music, and the example of it in the Psalms, began to flavour the corporate worship experience more and more (Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). Music, indeed, is a powerful means to release God's anointing (see 1 Samuel 16:16,23). But the issue here is important: music is only a means to aid our worship, and we must never forget that worship is a heart expression of passionate love for God.

(4.3) As human beings we have been **designed to express outwardly that which is alive within**. In fact John said it this way, "**let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth**" (1 John 3:18). Love in "word-only" is not as powerful as word and deed. Ask any wife whether she prefers just the words, "I love you" or those three words backed up with a dozen roses and a candle-lit dinner for two!

Therefore the Word of God gives ample encouragement and leeway for us to express our worship in passionate praise and intimate devotion. We are exhorted, not as a form or ritual, but as an **expression of our hearts** to:

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- ❑ shout and sing (Psalm 100:1-4),
- ❑ play instruments for and to God (Psalm 150:3-6),
- ❑ clap our hands (Psalm 47:1),
- ❑ dance (Psalm 149:3),
- ❑ rejoice (Psalm 118:24) [literally meaning “to spin around with intense emotion”],
- ❑ lift our hands (Psalm 63:4),
- ❑ kneel (Psalm 95:6), and
- ❑ cry out to God (Psalm 77:1).

We should enjoy the liberty that we have in Christ and to express our worship freely to Him. It may mean that initially we have to break through our own inhibitions, but the zealous release of our love through outward expression strengthens our faith and enables us to sense God’s Presence. One helpful tip: ***sing each song meaningfully and attempt to express what you sing.*** The Bible gives us wonderful liberty to express our love to Him!

The outward expression of worship should not be reserved for when we feel like doing it. Many times it is when we have every reason to wallow in depression or fatigue that faith-filled outward expression brings about a breakthrough. Just ask Paul and Silas about their ‘jail house rock’ experience in Acts 16. When the cold dungeon spelt black despair, their faith-filled praise released the supernatural Presence and power of God (vv. 24-26). **“Therefore by Him let us continually offer a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to His name”** (Hebrews 13:15). ***God’s love is the basis for which we praise God, not our circumstance or our feelings!***

- (4.4) Something significant happens when believers gather together to worship in His Name. The intensity of God’s Presence and power is often ***greater*** in corporate worship than when an individual worships alone. This definitely has to do with God’s “commanded” blessing on the unity of His people (Psalm 133:1-3). We refer to this as the “corporate anointing”.

Hebrews, Chapter 2, reveals how God makes us one in Christ as we worship in “***one accord***”, and in fact reveals that Jesus is “***in the midst of the assembly***” of gathered believers (vv. 11,12; also see Acts 2:1-4). ***God literally inhabits our praise and is enthroned in our worship*** (Psalm 22:3). In this corporate anointing, Jesus is high and lifted up, His Presence fills His people (Isaiah 6:1) and God ministers to us by releasing the gifts of the Spirit (1 Corinthians 12:7-11).

- (5) Not only must we understand how to “***enter***” His Presence, but we must also learn how to ***respond*** to His Presence. While the primary reason we gather for corporate worship is to give Him the praise and honour that He is so worthy of, God’s nature is to minister to us. He

desires to meet with us, touch our hearts and change us from “**glory to glory**” (2 Corinthians 3:18). So once we have entered His Presence with thanksgiving and praise, we must learn how to respond to Him:

- (5.1) **Acknowledge and receive His Presence.** Jesus said to the disciples “**Receive the Holy Spirit**” (John 20:22). On another occasion He said, “**Come to Me and drink**” (John 7:37). As we sense His Presence we need to acknowledge Him, which means to give our full attention to Him. Someone can be in your company without your acknowledgement. We must acknowledge His Presence and then receive Him into our innermost beings.
- (5.2) **Speak out the intimacy of your heart to Him, always listening out for His voice.** Real communion occurs as a believer begins to dialogue in this place of intimacy. Speaking in tongues enables a much deeper experience of worship (1 Corinthians 14:2,15). Let your spirit connect with His as you sing and speak in the heavenly language He has given you. [Be sure that this does not become a distraction to others around you (1 Corinthians 14:23)].
- (5.3) **Sanctify your imagination and open your heart to visions, pictures or verses of Scripture brought to your remembrance by the Holy Spirit** (see Ephesians 3:20, 1 Corinthians 12:7 and John 14:26). Many times God does this to speak to you. On other occasions you may sense it was a word for another or the body; in which case, you should submit it to the leadership of the meeting (1 Corinthians 14:27-32, 40).
- (5.4) **Respond promptly in faith when He speaks, either directly to you or through another.** Realize the tendency we have to be offended, or confused when God moves in a meeting. God touches our spirits with His Spirit (Romans 8:16), and our minds do not always understand it (1 Corinthians 14:2). For example, if you begin to cry or perhaps laugh or shake, trust Him by yielding to what He is doing even if you do not immediately know what is happening. Responding to His Presence requires absolute trust in Him.
- (5.5) **Remain sensitive to the flow of God’s Spirit upon the corporate gathering.** If, on the one hand, there is a very gentle sense of God’s Presence in the meeting, a loud expression of praise would not be appropriate. On the other hand, there are times when a rise in the vocal praise is Spirit-led and participating in this increases one’s awareness of His Presence.
- (5.6) **Continue focusing your attention on Him** (2 Corinthians 3:18). Set your heart and mind on Him and do not let yourself become distracted. Do not be in a hurry, but learn to appreciate and enjoy His Presence. Maximise your time with Him. Often you may need to sit or kneel because of the weight of His Presence upon you. Tip: as often as possible, keep your eyes closed, so that your ‘spiritual eyes’ can “**behold Him**” without distraction.

(6) There are three reasons why we should faithfully participate in corporate worship.

(6.1) God demands it.

(6.2) We need it.

(6.3) Honour requires it.

We show honour to the church, to our leaders and to God in faithful participation.

“And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some” (Hebrews 10:24,25).

(F) Hearing God’s voice.

(1) Jesus gave us the promise that we could hear His voice: **“My sheep hear My voice”** (John 10:27).

(2) The Holy Spirit is the One through whom we hear the voice of God: **“the Spirit of truth...will speak; and He will tell you things to come”** (John 16:13).

(3) God speaks through His Spirit in the following eight ways:

(3.1) *The Word of God.*

- God’s Word is the main way in which God speaks to us either by the clear **written commands** or by the **illumination** of the Scriptures. God’s Word is foundational and is that which all else is to be judged against. None of the seven ways below should contradict God’s Word or the ‘spirit’ of truth (Galatians 1:8).

(3.2) *The inward peace.*

- The inward peace is the **voice of conscience**, which though resident in every human being becomes sensitised to the Spirit in salvation (see Romans 8:16, 9:1 and Isaiah 55:12). We often sense a ‘peace’, like a green light, when the Spirit is leading us, or a “lack of peace”, like a red light, when the Spirit is not.

(3.3) *The inward voice.*

- The inward voice is the clear **voice of the Spirit** in your heart, although others do not hear it (see Acts 8:29; 9:3-6; 22:9). This often comes as **spontaneous thoughts** – as opposed to progressive reasoning – that you can almost say, “God said and I quote...”.
- Positioning yourself to hear the voice of the Spirit is as simple as surrendering your heart and mind in His Presence, being still and listening. Record the first spontaneous thoughts that come to mind, and then learn to discern and distinguish His voice from your own thoughts.

(3.4) **The counsel of mature believers.**

- The counsel of mature believers, especially local church **eldership** (Proverbs 11:14; 18:1; 2 Corinthians 2:12,13; Hebrews 13:17; Acts 13:1,2). For young people this specifically refers to your parents (Ephesians 6:1-3).

(3.5) **The gifts of the Spirit.**

- The gifts of the Spirit, and especially **prophecy**, are ways in which God speaks to us (1 Corinthians 12:7-11). Prophecy can be edificational (1 Corinthians 14:3) or directional (Acts 11:28).

(3.6) **The Providence of God.**

- The Providence of God refers to when the Spirit speaks **through arranging circumstance in our lives**. For example, Peter defended his ministry to the Gentiles by pointing to Providence: God's circumstantial intervention (Acts 11:15-18; 15:7-11).

(3.7) **Dreams and visions.**

- The phenomenon of dreams and visions is yet another way that God speaks (Joel 2:28; Matthew 1:20; Acts 9:3,10).

(3.8) **The ministry of angels.**

- The ministry of angels is another way God speaks (Hebrews 1:14; Acts 27:23,24).

(4) Securing confirmation in hearing God's voice.

(4.1) In making **big life decisions** we should seek the confirmation of two or three witnesses (two or three of the ways described above), to confirm that which we think God may be saying to us (2 Corinthians 13:1).

- Confirmation on **big** issues is important. Never underestimate our own carnal tendency to see and hear what we want to see and hear (Jeremiah 17:9). Also the Bible explains that we prophesy only "**in part**" (1 Corinthians 13:9), warns that the demonic can masquerade as angels of light (2 Corinthians 11:14) and that the enemy can also work in the realm of circumstance (Mark 4:17,19; 1 John 5:19). For these reasons, confirmation is vital.
- We suggest that you have the following confirmation before making a **big** decision: both (1) and (4), at least (2) or (3) and confirmed by either one of (5), (6), (7) or (8) [The numbers relate to the eight ways in which God speaks to us, discussed above].

(4.2) In making smaller and every day decisions, this kind of confirmation is not

necessary. For example, if you feel prompted by the Spirit to pray for someone, do it in an attitude of humility and love. The bigger the decision, the more important confirmation becomes.

(G) Elements in effective PRAYER.

(1) **Faith.**

We should pray with an expectant heart knowing that God desires to meet with us (Hebrews 11:6 and Psalm 100:1-5)!

(2) **Purity.**

We should pray with a pure heart. If we have unconfessed sin however, it should not keep us from Him, rather it is reason to draw near in confession in order to cleanse our hearts (Matthew 5:8; Psalm 66:18; Hebrews 4:15,16; 1 John 1:9)!

(3) **Humility.**

We should pray with a humble heart. Humility is the condition of the heart that attracts God's grace (James 4:6; Psalm 51:17).

(4) **Submission.**

We should pray with a submissive heart, lining ourselves up with His Spirit in the Name of Jesus (James 4:7; 1 John 5:14,15).

(5) **Perseverance.**

We should pray a persistent heart, knowing that it is through faith and patience that we inherit the promises of God (see Hebrews 6:12; Luke 11:5-8; 18:1-8).

(H) Fasting in PRAYER.

(1) Fasting means to ***abstain from certain physical needs, such as the need to eat, for a period of time in order to seek the Lord more earnestly.***

(2) Fasting is to be as normal to the Christian walk as prayer is, for Jesus said, "**when you fast**" not "***if*** you fast" (Matthew 6:16). In fact, fasting can be seen as 'concentrated' prayer where we surrender our will to Him by denying our 'self' to seek God.

(3) The Biblical way to fast is to ***abstain from food***, and to use the time when you would normally eat to pray. Fasting without prayer is simply a diet! [We can also fast by abstaining from other things that may be a sacrifice to you in order to spend more time earnestly seeking the Lord].

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- (3.1) An '*absolute* fast' refers to abstaining from all food for a certain period. For example, one does not eat anything for a whole day, or one misses every meal for three days.
- (3.2) A '*partial* fast' refers to abstaining from certain foods for a certain period. For example, Daniel fasted for 21 days eating just vegetables (Daniel 10:2,3).
- (4) When committing to fast, you should decide for **how long** you plan to fast and **what foods** you are going to abstain from. Suggestion: if you do not fast regularly, first do a partial fast for one day; then, do an absolute fast for one day. Then do an absolute fast for three days. Please note: when fasting, *we abstain from food but not from water!* If the human body does not have water (or liquid) for three days it can die!
- (5) **The primary purpose for fasting is to seek the Lord** (Luke 5:34,35). As we determine to seek His face and experience more of Him, we should bring any requests before God as a secondary purpose. It is as we seek Him and His Presence first, that we change and learn to discern His will. [See Isaiah 58:8,9 for the blessings that God promises in fasting].
- (6) Many people think that fasting is detrimental to a person's health. This is not true! In fact, **fasting is healthy!** It cleanses the body from toxins picked up through eating junk or unhealthy food. Doctors sometimes actually recommend fasting to cleanse the body.
- (7) The following are helpful information and guidelines in fasting:
- (7.1) The human body will only experience genuine hunger pains after 7 days of fasting. In other words, the 'hunger' we feel during a fast is really just 'appetite' pains – the body's adjustment to the disruption in its feeding patterns. Our body is used to food at regular intervals and suddenly cries out, "Hey, where is the food?!" during a fast. This is not dangerous at all – and is part of the self-denial power behind fasting.
- (7.2) During a fast, headaches and physical weariness are common and bad breath is inevitable. These are just part of the physical cleansing of the body. The more toxins in the body the more severe the headaches, weariness and bad breath will be. Do not take aspirin on an empty stomach: the headache will go when the toxins are out. Bath regularly during a fast and suck a mint for bad breath if you have to. Or squeeze a few drops of fresh lemon juice into your drinking water to neutralise bad breath. Do not chew gum during a fast as chewing stimulates the digestion process.
- (7.3) During a fast of 3 to 5 days we do not need to avoid physical work or exercise. Our physical strength will be reduced slightly, but there is no danger in continuing with your everyday activities. Fasting longer than 5 days should be well planned.
- (7.4) During a fast one should drink a lot of fluids (8 glasses per day). Drinking tea, coffee and soft drinks will only continue to add toxins to your body. Also one should not take vitamins during a fast, as vitamins need to be digested with food.

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- (7.5) If a person is on special medication or has sugar diabetes, medical advice should be sought from a doctor. There are other things besides food a person in this position can fast.
- (7.6) Be strict about the food you eat a day or two before starting a fast. Avoid eating big meals on these days – fill up more on fruit and vegetables.
- (7.7) Finally, do not feel that the fast is ruined if you eat something by accident: just swallow quickly and continue the fast!

DISCIPLINE TWO: “The Discipline of God’s Word”.

(A) The importance of GOD’S WORD.

“All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16,17).

(1) The Bible is the Word of God to and for humanity.

(1.1) The word “**inspiration**” in this verse above literally means “God-breathed”. **God breathed every word of the Bible** (Matthew 5:18).

(1.2) The Word of God, in essence, does two things. Firstly, **it describes God’s character**: defining Who He is and what He does. Secondly, **it reveals His will for us** as we relate to Him, to humanity and to the rest of creation. The Bible is the complete book for life: a love letter, a manual for living, a guide through every challenge and a weapon against every demonic attack.

(1.3) The knowledge and application of the Word of God in our lives is essential for victory over sin (Psalm 119:9), victory over the devil (1 John 2:14), effectiveness in prayer (John 15:7), fruitfulness in life (John 15:5,7,8), and in discerning the will of God (Colossians 1:9). Paul said:

“I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and give you an inheritance among all those who are sanctified” (Acts 20:32).

(2) The validity of the Bible has been proved beyond all doubt.

(2.1) Over the past two thousand years every conceivable attack to disprove the validity of the Bible has been made; all of which have failed. Many scholarly works have now been produced to prove the validity of the Bible. [We recommend the study of Josh McDowell’s two volumes, “Evidence that Demands a Verdict”].

- Many have actually written books testifying how they became Christians after attempting to disprove the Bible as God’s Word. The faultless and meticulous procedures by which the Scriptures have been recorded and passed down to us, means that what we have in the Bible is literally God’s Word to humanity!

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- History, science, archaeology and psychology all serve to prove the validity of the Bible. And then of course we have the fact that God, the most awesome and powerful Being in the universe, was the Author and Overseer of its production. Anybody who questions the validity of the Bible, not only has to face the fact that there is more evidence that the Bible is God's Word than that Nelson Mandela was president of our nation, but would have to explain how the Sovereign Creator of everything could not even write a book for His creation to live by!
- There have been fools like Voltaire (Psalm 14:1), a famous atheist who gave his life to eradicate God from society. On his deathbed Voltaire claimed, "In one hundred years time the Bible will be forgotten". Not only was he in for an eternal shock after his death by meeting the One whom he had renounced, but amazingly, exactly one hundred years to the month of his godless boast, his own house became the headquarters for the Geneva Bible Society!

(2.2) Jesus declared, "**Heaven and earth may pass away, but My Word will never pass away**" (Matthew 24:35).

(3) The inspired writing of the Bible.

(3.1) The Bible was written...

- by 40 different writers,
- over a period of 1500 years,
- spanning several continents,
- in three different languages,
- from an amazing variety of walks of life (doctors, kings, fishermen, shepherds, prophets, government employees).

(3.2) Yet the Bible is unanimous and faultless in its message and its principles to every aspect of life! Now God did this, not only to **give evidence of His divine working in its production**, but also **so that we would live by His Word and define life from His perspective**.

(B) The primacy of preaching and teaching GOD'S WORD.

- (1) The preaching and teaching of Bible is God's chosen means of bringing unbelievers to salvation and of growing believers in sanctification.
 - (1.1) The preaching and teaching of the Bible reveals the truth, and thereby illuminates and renews our heart and mind (2 Timothy 3:16; Titus 1:3). Faith arises when the Spirit of God enlightens the knowledge of God communicated through preaching or teaching: **"So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the Word of God"** (Romans 10:17).
 - (1.2) Generally, preaching refers to proclaiming the Gospel to unbelievers, while teaching refers to explaining the Word to believers. However, preaching can also refer to the sharing of the Word in a way that exhorts and motivates.
- (2) Believers have a sober responsibility to the spoken word.
 - (2.1) ***Believers should devote themselves to the teaching of the leadership of the local church to which the Spirit has joined them*** (Acts 2:42; Hebrews 13:7,17). This means that we should honour those who share God's Word and expect God to speak to us through them. The following are helpful tips considering that we tend to forget up to 95% of what we hear after 72 hours:
 - Be ready and eager to hear God's Word (Luke 8:8).
 - Continually deal with passive attitudes that hinder us from hearing God's Word (Luke 8:18).
 - Confess any sin that will blind you from the truth (James 1:21).
 - Determine to act on the truth you hear (James 1:22).
 - Take notes of what God is saying to you (Hebrews 2:1).
 - (2.2) ***Believers should weigh the message spoken carefully.*** The Bible refers to this as a noble characteristic: to not only receive the **"word with all readiness"** but to search the **"Scriptures daily to find out whether"** it is so (Acts 17:11). Every believer has the responsibility to ensure that they are not gullibly accepting falsehood, and that they are taking ownership of the truth taught.
 - (2.3) ***Believers should apply the Word spoken through dependence on the Holy Spirit.*** The Bible warns us against being **"hearers only"** explaining that unless we are **"doers of the Word"** we deceive ourselves (James 1:22). The ways in which we are to apply the Word consist of two skills: meditation and study.

(C) Meditating on GOD’S WORD.

(1) Biblical meditation is a vital spiritual discipline.

“Blessed is the man...[whose] delight is the [Word] of the Lord, and in His [Word] he meditates day and night...And whatever he does shall prosper” (Psalm 1:1-3).

(1.1) To “**meditate**” literally means, “to ponder by talking to oneself”. It is the same word that was used to explain how a cow “ruminates”, chewing its cud. A cow chews on its food, swallows it, and then brings it up to chew on it some more. In this way, the cow extracts all the nutrients from the food it eats.

(1.2) Meditation then refers to **focused thinking** about a verse or passage of Scripture, asking the Holy Spirit to reveal its application to your life (Psalm 119:18).

(1.3) Consider this five-point strategy to enable effective Bible mediation:

- *Picture it!* Visualise the verse or passage.
- *Pronounce it!* Read the verse or passage out aloud each time emphasising a different word or phrase.
- *Paraphrase it!* Rewrite or re-say the verse or passage in your own words.
- *Personalise it!* Replace the pronouns or people with your own name or circumstance.
- *Pray it!* Turn the verse or passage into prayer and dialogue with the Lord.

(2) **“What should we meditate on?”**

(2.1) During our daily prayer time with God, covered in section one earlier, meditate on...

- The verses and notes that you received from the preaching or teaching you heard at the previous service. James 1:21-25 spells out how important it is to meditate on the message spoken, and it is helpful to meditate on the notes you jotted down during the message so that you can seek to apply them in your life.
- The verses and notes that you made during your own personal reading and study of God’s Word. [See point (D) for instructions on this].

(3) The importance of ***Bible memorisation***.

“This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate in it day and night, that you may observe to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success” (Joshua 1:8).

- (3.1) The memorisation of Scripture was a key Hebrew concept in Bible times. In fact, it's the reason that Jesus did not have to run off to fetch a scroll from the temple when the devil tempted him in Luke 4. He simply stood His ground and spoke, from memory, "**It is written...**" and neutralised the devil's fiery darts at every turn (vv. 4,8,12). Jesus promised us the same firepower when He said that the Holy Spirit would bring back to our "**remembrance**" the Word of God (John 14:26). ***The condition of this promise is that we first put the Word of God into our memory!*** This requires that we memorise the verse or passage that we are meditating on.
- (3.2) Memorising is like chewing gum. Commit a verse or passage to memory, and regularly "chew on it" throughout the day: "**chew on it**" all day and draw the life of Christ from His Word. Writing the verse or passage on a "memory card" may be a helpful aid in the skill of memorisation.

(D) Studying GOD'S WORD.

(1) Biblical study is an important spiritual discipline.

- (1.1) Biblical meditation enriches our devotional intimacy with God enabling us to abide in Him and His words to abide in us. However, ***we must also grow in our knowledge of the Bible and this requires regular reading and study of God's Word*** (2 Peter 3:14-18). As Paul said to Timothy: "**Be diligent to present yourselves approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth**" (2 Timothy 2:15).
- A survey done in Christian circles revealed a horrible statistic: only 58% of believers questioned knew the names of the four Gospels, and only 52% could correctly identify Jesus as the speaker of the "Sermon on the Mount" in Matthew, Chapters 5-7! Furthermore, the most well known verse was quoted in the survey, was "God helps those who help themselves" – which is not even a verse, but a statement made by a former American politician!
 - God laments, "**My people are destroyed for a lack of knowledge**" (Hosea 4:6). It is only when we have an accurate knowledge of something that we can properly receive it, embrace it and apply it. If our Bible knowledge is poor, our understanding of God will never grow and our walk with Him will eventually deteriorate.

(1.2) The best way to start studying the Bible is to **read it regularly!**

- Before you run out and purchase a number of sophisticated study guides that will probably end up as dust collectors in a week or so, we encourage you simply start a thorough and regular Bible **reading** programme. Once you have read the Bible through – both the Old and New Testament (suggestions are given below) – are you perhaps ready for using a systematic Bible study course.

(1.3) ***Assuming*** that you are regularly receiving the spoken Word at your local church, and that you are meditating on God's Word daily as part of your prayer time, let us give you some helpful guidelines to reading and studying God's Word.

- ***Set time aside*** at least once a week for a period of around 30-60 minutes for focused Bible reading and study.
- Begin by ***asking the Holy Spirit*** (the Author of the Bible!) to guide you. Develop the Psalm 119:18 attitude of expectation, "**Open my eyes, that I may see wondrous things from Your Word**". Expect that God has something for you from His Word!
- ***Start by reading through the smaller books of the New Testament.*** As mentioned already, many people wanting to start studying the Bible purchase some Bible study guide but battle through it because they have never first read through the Bible. So use the time that you set aside each week to read the Bible. Start by reading through the shorter letters of the New Testament like Philipians, 1 Thessalonians, James, 1 Peter, or if you want to read a Gospel start with Mark. Then once you have read through the shorter ones tackle the longer letters and Gospels in the New Testament.

In reading the Old Testament, we suggest that you read a Psalm a day as part of your prayer time, and then use follow the historical approach to the Old Testament: in other words, read the books as they follow history's timeline:

- ***Attempt to read through an entire letter, or Gospel at a time during your study session.*** The longer letters and the Gospels would obviously take more than an hour to read through, so commit to work through one of them over two or three weeks. The larger books of the Old Testament may take four to five weeks, but the idea is to read lengthily portions of the Bible to get the perspective and context of where each story, or incident occurs within God's Word.

Avoid jumping around from one favourite verse to the next. You want to read and study the 'whole' Bible – especially that which you do not know yet!

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Many Bibles actually give you a brief introduction and background to each letter and book written in the Bible. This is helpful to understand the “ins” and “outs” of what you are reading. If your Bible does not have such information, try to borrow one for your reading/study hour each week.

- **Make notes, jot down any verses that stand out for you and write out what you sense God may be saying to you.** This makes it exciting as our goal is not just Bible knowledge for the sake of knowledge itself, but it is to grow in our knowledge of and relationship with Him! Use these notes as the basis of your daily Bible meditation.
- **Do not get hung up on difficult verses, move on!** Make a note of any questions that you have so that you can ask advice on them at another time. Avoid getting stuck on difficult issues that simply hinder your reading and study. For example, if you’re reading Mark, Chapter 1, you may get stuck at why Jesus told the man who He had just healed not to tell anybody about it (v. 44). The answer is simply because Jesus did not want His fame to spread too quickly as it would bring about the murderous attempts on His life too early. There usually is a simple, contextual answer to each question, so do not get caught on these kind of issues. You can always ask somebody who can help you at another time.
- **Be realistic with your reading and study goals.** Rather be victorious in small amounts and continue, than be defeated by trying, for example, to finish the Gospel of Mark in 30 minutes and give up!
- **Use an appropriate translation and, if possible, purchase additional translations to assist your reading.**

There are numerous different translations of the Bible available to aid our understanding of God’s Word. Some are puzzled as to why we have so many different versions. The answer is simply that the different versions developed over time as different translators attempted to serve different purposes in their translations. For example, the King James Version (KJV) was published in 1611, and therefore has a very old style English. The New King James Version (NKJV) is an updated version using modern English. So we have two translations serving their particular generation using modern vernacular.

Furthermore, some versions are proper **translations** in that they attempt to literally translate the language of the Old and New Testament, word for word. Examples of translations include the King James (KJV), New King James (NKJV), New International (NIV) and American Standard (ASV) versions. These are effective for study purposes.

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Other versions like the Living Bible (LB), the Good News (GN) and the Message are **paraphrases** in modern speech, aiming to capture the idea or intent of the original languages. These versions are best used for the purpose of simple Bible reading, and can be used in support of a translation in Bible study.

The Amplified version (AMP) is unique in that it attempts to amplify the meaning of every verse, and makes for interesting reading and explanation. It is best used in conjunction with a translation for study purposes.

It should also be noted that although the translations and paraphrases are trustworthy, and their accuracy exceptional, inconsistencies can arise in the translating from the original Bible languages. Only the original Scriptures written in Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek are the accurate, infallible Word of God.

DISCIPLINE THREE: “The Discipline of Fellowship”.

(A) The importance of FELLOWSHIP.

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34,35).

- (1) Fellowship is the application of God’s command to love one another.
 - (1.1) The word “**fellowship**” (Greek: *koinonia*) is a **unity produced by the Holy Spirit in knitting believers to one another in the bond of love.**
 - (1.2) Fellowship is a **selfless love** only made possible by the Spirit of God enabling a “**new**” standard of love: “**as I have loved you**”.
 - (1.3) Fellowship swept through the early church provoking the world to godly jealousy (Acts 2:42-47). One secular historian of the first century wrote: “How these Christians love each other!”
- (2) Fellowship with one another is an indicator of the degree of fellowship we have with God (John 13:35; 1 John 1:7; 3:14; 4:20,21).

(B) The primacy of love.

- (1) The two Greatest Commandments revolve around the word “**love**”: “**love the Lord your God**”, and “**love your neighbour as yourself**” (Matthew 22:37-40).
 - (1.1) The second command to love our neighbour does not just happen automatically when we get the first command to love God right. It is a choice we must consciously make. However, loving God does enable us in choosing to love our neighbour.
 - (1.2) The vast majority of the New Testament epistles **focuses on our responsibility to love one another**, assuming our love for God is in order. So selfish is our carnal nature that unless we diligently obey God’s instructions to love our neighbour, even our worship to God would become self-serving!
- (2) The apostles John, James Peter and Paul all refer to this second command in their letters, making detailed comments concerning it (see 2 John 5; 1 John 3:16; James 2:8,9; 1 Peter 4:8 and Galatians 5:13,14).

(2.1) Notice these verses:

“But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection” (Colossians 3:14).

- Love is primary, and the bond that holds all else together in perfection.

“By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren” (1 John 3:16).

- Love is defined by the sacrificial life and service of Jesus Christ, and we are to love others with the same measure.

“And above all these things have a fervent love for one another, for ‘love will cover a multitude of sins’” (1 Peter 4:8).

- Love covers: it does not excuse sin, nor does it expose sin. Love embraces the sinner, and provides the environment in which sincere repentance can occur.

(C) FELLOWSHIP in word and deed.

(1) Fellowship is to be in word and deed (1 John 3:16-18).

(1.1) Fellowship does not just refer to “hanging out” or “socializing.” Fellowship is love in action: expressed through the way we talk to one another, pray for one another and serve one another.

(2) The Bible outlines nearly 30 **“one another”** commands: practical ways in which we are to interact. We call these the “intimate responsibilities of Scripture,” which can only realistically be lived out as a “lifestyle” in the context of a local church:

| | |
|--|--------------------------------------|
| Love (John 13:34,35) | Bear burdens (Galatians 6:2) |
| Fellowship with (1 John 1:7) | Be kind to (Ephesians 4:32) |
| Members of (Romans 12:5) | Forgive (Ephesians 4:32) |
| Devoted to (Romans 12:10) | Submit to (Ephesians 5:21) |
| Outdo in showing honour (Romans 12:10) | Bearing with (Colossians 3:13) |
| Rejoice with (Romans 12:15) | Encourage (1 Thessalonians 5:11) |
| Weep with (Romans 12:15) | Build up (1 Thessalonians 5:11) |
| Same mind towards (Romans 12:16) | Stir up (Hebrews 10:24) |
| Not judge (Romans 14:13) | Be hospitable (1 Peter 4:9) |
| Accept (Romans 15:7) | Minister gifts to (1 Peter 4:10) |
| Counsel (Romans 15:14) | Speak not evil against (1 Peter 5:5) |
| Greet (Romans 16:16) | Grumble not against (James 5:9) |

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Wait for (1 Corinthians 11:33)

Care for (1 Corinthians 12:25)

Serve (Galatians 5:13)

Confess faults to (James 5:16)

Pray for one another (James 5:16)

(D) FELLOWSHIP is a discipline.

(1) Fellowship is a discipline that we must learn, develop and nurture.

(1.1) Fellowship is a discipline because the human nature only enjoys relationship based on **selfish motives**. As long as relationships are convenient and beneficial to us, as long as it serves us, we are committed to it. But when it costs us something, or when it requires that we dwell with people that we do not “naturally click with”, we often want to opt out.

(1.2) Fellowship refers to selfless love that exists on the basis of **covenant** rather than **convenience**. It enables meaningful relationships to develop beyond natural barriers of background, age, gender, race, profession and personality. However, it is a way of life we are required to learn, and develop.

(E) The potential for offence.

(1) The potential for offence in every relationship is inevitable.

(1.1) Jesus said, “**It is impossible that no offence should come**” and warned us against being the one who causes offence (Luke 17:1). As long as we live on God’s green earth we will have the **potential** to be offended, for two reasons:

- The people that we interact with, no matter how mature in the Lord they may be, still have **imperfections** that may offend us.
- **We still have imperfections!!!** The truth is that the ease with which we get offended is directly related to our lack of maturity (Psalm 119:165). Mature believers know how to take all offences to the Lord, “**bearing with one another, and forgiving one another**” so that even if one has a justifiable “**complaint against another**” forgiveness and reconciliation prevails (Colossians 3:13).

(1.2) Every single believer will have the potential to be offended at some point, and most will be able to honestly say, “**I was wounded in the house of my friends**” (Zechariah 13:6). The more time we spend with believers the more likely their imperfections will reveal our own imperfections and cause offence.

- (1.3) In response to the question, “**how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him?**” Jesus replied emphatically, “**seventy times seven**” (Matthew 18:21,22). This refers to **limitless** forgiveness (1 Corinthians 13:4,5) for “**if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses**” (Matthew 6:15).
- (2) A key to spiritual maturity is the ability to take offences to the Lord.
- (2.1) David said, “**In return for my love they are my accusers, but I give myself to prayer**” (Psalm 109:4). We are not to spill our pain on others in gossip or bottle up our bitterness: no matter what the offence, we are to pour our hearts to an audience of One: Jesus Christ!
- (2.2) Gossip is a backwash of un-prayed prayers that destroys three people: first, the person that you are gossiping about, second, the person that you are gossiping to and finally, yourself, the gossip. “**Pursue peace with all...looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled...**” (Hebrews 12:14,15). If we will give ourselves to prayer, we will receive the love of God for any person and every situation!
- (3) God’s Word gives us clear instructions in dealing with a person who has sinned against us.
- (3.1) We are to follow Jesus’ counsel in Matthew 18:15-17:
- You are to “**tell him his fault between you and him alone**” (v. 15). Clearly, we are not to drag others (not even leaders) into our mess! Furthermore, because we have given ourselves to prayer, our primary goal is **reconciliation** of the relationship, not to justify the situation and “put the other person in their place”. We should not arrive with a bazooka on one shoulder and a grudge on the other! Listen to these words, “**A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger**” (Proverbs 15:1).

“**Between you and him alone**”, you should share how you felt hurt by what the other person did or did not do, not demanding justice, but giving the Spirit of God space to do His work (Romans 12:19; Proverbs 28:23). On the one hand, be sure not to speak out of the emotion of the offence, and on the other hand, do not allow too much time to pass before seeking reconciliation, or the offence will fester and poison you (Ephesians 4:26).
 - Sadly, if he will not reconcile with you, “**take with you one or two more**” to serve as a **mediator** (v. 16). Again, the purpose is reconciliation, and with that in mind, we need to select an unbiased mediator! The person you select should be mature in the Lord, and we suggest that you ask one of the deacons in your

church, who should not be poisoned with “your side of the story”. If you desire reconciliation and have acknowledged your wrong in the situation, you should invite a mediator in without first priming them with “your facts”. If you are ever asked to serve as a mediator, refuse to hear the “facts” until you have both parties before you (Proverbs 18:17)!

- Sadder still, if the person still does not reconcile, **“tell it to the church”** (v. 17). This does not mean a license to gossip! Consistent with the counsel of God’s Word, the best way to follow this instruction is to bring the matter along with the mediator, to the Elders of the church who would then have to follow God’s leading in carrying out Biblical correction.

There are unfortunate times when, no matter what we do, others will not reconcile with us. As long as we have made every attempt to seek reconciliation we can have peace with God: **“as much as depends on you, live peaceably with all men”** (Romans 12:18).

- (3.2) Too many believers approach reconciliation with a confrontational heart that demands ‘righteousness’. This seemingly “uncompromising” approach just serves as a cloak for us to speak out our own insecurities, and **violates** the second of the two Great Commandments: **“you shall love your neighbour as yourself”**. It has been said that we sadly judge ourselves by our **intentions**, but judge others by their **actions**. This should not be so, for **“whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them”** (Matthew 7:12). We all desire to be understood and we will all, generally, receive what another has to say if they treat us with **respect**. We expect this from others; therefore, we ought to do it for others!

- (3.3) Love believes the best in every situation and therefore can speak the **“truth in love”** (Ephesians 4:15) in such a way that it **imparts grace**, not judgement, to the hearers (Ephesians 4:29). In other words, we must share the truth – for nobody grows where truth is absent – but we must share it **wrapped in God’s love!** And the love of God is pure, secure and unfailing (1 Corinthians 13:4-8). Simply using a **humble tone**, and words like, “I felt hurt by what happened...” rather than, “you hurt me...” go along way to wrapping the truth in love.

- (4) Seeking reconciliation when we have sinned against another.

- (4.1) As soon as we realize that we may have offended another, we are to seek forgiveness: Jesus said, **“First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift”** (Matthew 5:23,24). This expresses the commitment we are to have one for another, for if we raise our hands in worship but allow offence to divide us then our worship is meaningless!

- (4.2) ***We need to humble ourselves and repent to the one we have offended, asking for forgiveness without trying to explain, or justify ourselves.*** We should do this even when the person we offended is just perceiving the offence: perception is as good as reality! If the offender and the offended are both yielding to the Spirit of God, they should meet somewhere in the middle of “pursuing peace” with one another, wrap their arms around each other and be reconciled in His Name!

(F) Biblical Judgment.

- (1) Jesus said, **“Judge not, that you be not judged. For with what judgement you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you”** (Matthew 7:1,2). He then speaks about first removing the plank from our own eyes, for **“then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother’s eye”** (vv. 3-5). Note these two points:
- (1.1) The word Jesus uses here for **“judge”** is the word “condemn”. We are not to condemn or **“write one another off”**. Although we must not condemn one another, Jesus still implies that we have the responsibility to **“remove the speck from [our] brother’s eye”** (v.5). Is there a **“measure”** (v.2) that we should use?
- (1.2) Yes, Jesus also said, **“Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgement”** (John 7:24). This command to judge is not a contradiction of Matthew 7 in that it refers to **holding one another accountable**. We are to judge one another in holding one another accountable to the **“measure”** of God’s Word, which sets the standard of righteous judgement.
- (2) Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 5:11-13 that we must not judge unbelievers who are not accountable to live by God’s Word; he writes, **“those who are outside God judges”** (v. 13). But we must hold believers accountable; Paul writes, **“judge those who are inside”** (v. 12). We are therefore instructed to judge other believers in holding them accountable to live by God’s Word.
- (2.1) We are to hold other believers accountable to the “absolutes” of God’s Word (clear commands) and not our “interpretations,” or “convictions” (personal opinions).
- (2.2) As we grow in the Lord, we develop convictions based on our spiritual progress. This is good and important. But the problem arises when we judge others based on our convictions, or worse still, condemn them based on our opinions. Paul warned: **“Knowledge puffs up, but love edifies”** (1 Corinthians 8:1). Increasing in spiritual knowledge can result in pride, and our pride causes us to condemn others.

Therefore, we are not to use our knowledge to condemn others weaker in the faith **but maturity means that we serve them in love**. All knowledge should lead to more intimate worship of God and more selfless, service of others! **“But beware lest somehow this liberty of yours becomes a [cause of offence] to those who are weak...And because of your knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died? But when you thus sin against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ”** (1 Corinthians 8:9,11,12). In other words, we must lay down our own personal convictions in serving others so as to maintain the greatest command: “love”.

(2.3) In explaining the different opinions concerning things like what we eat and drink, what holidays we celebrate and what day of the week we corporately worship on (see Romans 14:1-23; Colossians 2:16-23), Paul concluded:

- **“Let each be fully convinced in his own mind”** (Romans 14:5). In other words, each of us must be true to the convictions of our own heart. We must live our lives by the conviction of the Holy Spirit knowing that we **“shall give account of [ourselves] to God”** (v. 12).
- **“Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, but rather resolve this, not to [cause one another to be offended]”** (Romans 14:13). In other words, we are not to judge another based on our own personal convictions; no matter how good our personal interpretations of God’s absolutes may be.

(3) True fellowship requires spiritual maturity, and the ability to be accountable to one another in love.

(3.1) On the one hand, it requires a teachable heart and a willingness to be held accountable to the truth by other believers. **“Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, but he who hates correction is stupid”** (Proverbs 12:1).

(3.2) On the other hand, it requires a loving determination to lay down our own convictions in holding other believers accountable. **“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interest, but also for the interests of others”** (Philippians 2:3,4).

DISCIPLINE FOUR: “The Discipline of Giving”.

(A) The importance of GIVING.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son” (John 3:16).

(1) To love is to give.

(1.1) “**God is love**” (1 John 4:8,16) and His nature is to give. Therefore, **to reflect His character we are instructed to live a lifestyle of giving**. In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul teaches on giving and writes, “**as you abound in everything – in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in all diligence, and in your love...see that you abound in this grace [of giving] also**” (v.7).

(2) The Bible uses the word “**believe**,” **272** times. The word “**pray**” is used **371** times. The word “**love**” is used, as may be expected, almost twice as many times: **714!** But the word “**give**” is used an amazing **2162** times in the Bible! Two thirds of Jesus’ parables and one out of every six verses in the Bible speak about material possessions. God is ‘big’ into giving because it is the acid test of our surrender to God, and our loyalty in His Kingdom.

(3) **God judges our godly use of money as a prerequisite to being entrusted with spiritual riches** (Luke 16:11)! In other words, if we are faithful stewards of our financial resources, He will entrust spiritual resources to our stewardship.

(B) GIVING is a discipline.

(1) Giving is a spiritual discipline we must nurture **because it is so contrary to our basic human nature**. While we are to give in all aspects, it is not surprising that Jesus implied that the greatest challenge to full surrender to God is money (Matthew 6:24). Amazingly He did not say the challenge was between God and satan, **but between God and mammon** (the money god). While many will brazenly state their allegiance to Jesus Christ, **their use of money** may reveal that their loyalty lies elsewhere.

(2) “**For the love of money is the root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from their faith**” (1 Timothy 6:10). The “**love of money**” means to put one’s **trust in money**. Are we trusting in money or in God? Are we dependent on money or on Him? Is money our driving force in life or is the Kingdom? The proof that our trust and dependency are in God is in a lifestyle of **generous giving**. And our only antidote against materialism in the discipline of giving.

- (3) God has set in place a means of faithfully managing our money called **tithes** and **offerings**. As we embrace these principles, we honour God as our Source and Provider, we walk free from “mammon” and prove ourselves faithful.

(C) The Tithe.

- (1) The “**tithe**” is an act of worship.

- (1.1) In salvation we **transfer ownership** of our lives – all that we are and all that we have – to God. This surrender includes our finances as we acknowledge that God is the One who gives us the ability to produce wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18).
- (1.2) In response to His Lordship, we are to “**tithe**” to God in worship. **The purpose of tithing is to continually acknowledge God as Lord, putting Him first in our lives** (Deuteronomy 14:23). Through this act of worship we recognise and honour God as our Source and Sustainer.
- (1.3) Disobedience in tithing is tantamount to robbing God: “**you have robbed Me!**” (Malachi 3:8). We cannot complain about the crime in our nation if we are doing likewise to God! If we fail to bring our tithe, we rob Him and live under a curse (Malachi 3:9).
- (1.4) The “**tithe**” means one tenth. It is one tenth (10%) of either the income we earn or financial gifts we receive.

- (2) The “**tithe**” belongs to God.

“**And all the tithe...is the Lord’s. It is holy to the Lord” (Leviticus 27:30).**

- (2.1) **The tithe belongs to the Lord.** It is not ours to give, but His that we return to Him.
- So how much belongs to God? **100%** belongs to God! However, while He requires that we return the tithe He allows us to steward the remaining 90%.
 - We are to bring 10% of what we earn (gross) as worship to Him: God’s people should ‘pay’ God before they pay the Receiver of Revenue!
- (2.2) We “**bring**” the “**tithe**” to God; it is not ours to give.
- “**Bring all the tithes into the storehouse, that there may be food in My house, and try Me now in this’ says the Lord” (Malachi 3:10).**
- Since the tithe “**is the Lord’s**” (Leviticus 27:30) the Bible does not say, “give” the tithe; we are to “**bring**” the tithe. The tithe is not ours to give. We are to “**bring**” – or return, the tithe to the Lord in worship.

- We are to **“bring”** the tithe to the **“storehouse”**. The **“storehouse”** was the place to which the people brought their tithes and offerings to be administered by their spiritual oversight (see 1 Chronicles 26:20). Therefore the **“storehouse” represents the local “house” or church** to which the Holy Spirit has assigned us; the church in which we are spiritually fed. It is not Biblical to send our tithes to a mission organisation or a charity need. The tithe must be brought into the local church as worship unto the Lord.
- The primary use of the tithe should go toward compensating those who are employed in the church administration. In the Old Testament those who were appointed Levites gave up the right to earn their own money, and were thus compensated through the tithes of the people (see Numbers 18:21-24 and Deuteronomy 14:27-29). Paul then applies this for us in the New Testament by saying that those who sow **“spiritual things”** should be compensated with **“material things”**. He uses several analogies to emphasise that those who give up the opportunity to earn their own salary in order to minister to the church, should be compensated with the tithes of the people (1 Corinthians 9:7-14). While there are obviously other expenses associated with a local church, the salaries of those employed on the church administration should be met first.

(3) The **“tithe”** positions us financially.

- (3.1) As we bring the tithe in worship, faith and obedience, we position ourselves in God's blessing: **“I will open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you such a blessing that there is not room enough to receive it...I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes...And all the nations will call you blessed”** (Malachi 3:10-12).
- (3.2) We cannot ask God to deliver us from the enemy's attack on our finances if we are not tithing, for if we obey God in this area He declares, **“I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes”**. God has not designed the tithe for His benefit, but for ours!

(4) The **“tithe”** is a principle of God's character.

- (4.1) Some may ask: “Is the tithe not part of the Old Testament Law?” Yes it is, but God instituted the tithe 430 years before the Law was given through the father of the faith, Abraham (Genesis 14:18-20). The fact that God also incorporated it as part of the Law reveals that it is very much part of His character that He longed to reveal to His people. In other words, tithing was included in the Law for the same reason that commands such as loving our neighbour and forbidding murder were. Furthermore, Jesus affirmed the tithe (Matthew 23:23) and Hebrews 7:1-25 reveals that it is Jesus Christ who now receives our tithes as worship.

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(4.2) The tithe is a principle ingrained in humanity (Genesis 28:22): every person tithes to the god that they serve. If their god is alcohol, a tithe of their earnings will be given to it. Whether their god is sport, business, pleasure or whatever, at least a tithe will be brought to the lord of their life. But the redeemed are set free from the idols of this world to serve the living God. And we honour the Lord by bringing our tithes to Him in worship.

(5) Tithing and debt.

(5.1) Tithing does not bail us out of debt. It does begin the process of “debt deliverance”, **because it orders our budget according to the Kingdom’s economy**. When we put the tithe first on our budget, we begin to appropriate the power of Matthew 6:33, **“Seek first the Kingdom of God”**.

(5.2) **Then we need to honestly evaluate our standard of living based on our income and expenditure**. Only greed maintains an above standard of living that justifies an inability to bring the tithe. In other words, first bring the tithe, **second scale down your standard of living to live within your means**.

- This requires radical action, earnest prayer and expectant faith. This dedication and consecration positions us, not just in God’s will, but also in His blessing!
- We usually think that the way out of our financial predicament is to make more money. But this is almost never the answer! Most times more money just leads to a higher standard of living and more debt!
- Living by God’s principles, being a faithful steward of **what He has given to us** and living by faith in His sufficiency is our answer!
- Biblical debt is when your liabilities exceed your assets and we should not be indebted to anyone except to love them (Romans 13:8).

(6) Common excuses to avoid tithing.

(6.1) **“I’m not being spiritually fed”**. The truth is that we will never be spiritually fed until we submit to God, be faithful in the local church to which He has assigned us and obey His Word in tithing!

(6.2) **“I can’t afford to tithe”**. The reality is that we cannot afford not to tithe! The very reason that we may be in a financial predicament is because we have not been tithing. We must repent of our lack of tithing; put the tithe first in our budget and then scale down our budget to make tithing possible. This may involve a process as we reshuffle our budget, but radical action must be taken.

- (6.3) **“But I cannot trust the leadership with my money”**. If we cannot trust our leadership with our money how can we trust them with our soul (Hebrews 13:17)? We must either repent of our hard heart against our leadership or submit to anointed eldership that we can trust with our soul! But whatever we do: we must not rob God!
- The **only** issue that one should be concerned about when bringing the tithe is that the local eldership are tithing on the church income to the church’s spiritual covering (Numbers 18:26). Believers have no other role in deciding how the eldership should manage this money. Simply bring the tithe into the storehouse, rejoice in the blessings of obedience and do not put pressure on the eldership – let them carry out their responsibility before God.
- (6.4) **“I have tried tithing and it does not work”**. Some, on the basis of the verse: **“try Me now in this [issue of tithing]”** (Malachi 3:10), excuse their lack of tithing by saying that they have tried it, and it did not work for them. Tithing is not something we try; it is a command we obey or suffer the consequences of! Yes, we are encouraged to prove God’s faithfulness, but we must not forget that **He reserves the right to test us!** If our motives are impure and we try use tithing as a slot machine formula, God will withhold His blessing, thereby testing our hearts. If tithing did not “work” for us, **the problem is in our heart not in God’s Word**. God allows us to prove His faithfulness when our hearts are pure and we tithe in obedience and faith.

(D) Offerings.

- (1) We are to give **“offerings”** out of the 90% God has allowed us to steward.
- (1.1) The tithe is the first 10% of our finances that we **“bring”** to God. From the remaining 90%, we are to **“give”** offerings.
 - (1.2) Giving **“offerings”** is first an act of worship: we are to **first give ourselves to the Lord** and then in expectant faith (2 Corinthians 8:3,5). In other words, our offerings are first worship to God, and then seed that we sow. Our giving, therefore, must therefore be in line with the motive of worship.
- (2) **“Offerings”** then prosper us financially.
- (2.1) Bringing the tithe positions us financially, but giving offerings prospers us financially.
“He who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and he who sows bountifully will also reap bountifully” (2 Corinthians 9:6).
 - (2.2) When we give in faith, we apply the principle of **sowing and reaping** (Galatians 6:7).

“Now you Philippians know also that...no church shared with me concerning giving and receiving but you only...Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account...And my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:15-19).

- Paul’s confidence that the Philippian church would enjoy the “**fruit**” (v. 17) of all their “**need**” met (v. 19), was dependent on the seed that they had sown. We cannot claim the promise of verse 19, until we have sown the seed of verse 15!
- We should sow financial seed standing on God’s promise to “**supply all [our] need**” (v. 19). Notice that God promises to supply all our need, not our greed!
- Jesus referred to the principle of “**giving and receiving**” (v. 15) in Luke 6:38 when He said, “**Give, and it will be given to you**”. In other words, to the extent that you give, you will receive.

(2.3) We are to give offerings first to God (2 Corinthians 8:5) and then as He leads us in two main areas...

- The church: Offerings should be given anonymously (Matthew 6:3,4) and should be given for those who instruct in the Word (Galatians 6:6), the needs of the church (2 Corinthians 9:12), the preaching of the Gospel (2 Corinthians 9:13,14), and should be given to the leaders of the church to be used at their discretion (Acts 4:34,35).
- The poor: Offerings should be given to the needy as the Lord leads us (Proverbs 19:17). [The poor are not just, for example, street children, but also includes anybody in need].

(2.4) Offerings should be given...

- Regularly: “**On the first day of the week let each one of you lay something aside**” (1 Corinthians 16:2).
- Prayerfully: “**as he purposes in his heart**” (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- Abundantly: “**bountifully,**” not “**sparingly**” (2 Corinthians 9:6).
- Willingly: “**willingness,**” not “**grudgingly**” (2 Corinthians 9:2,7).
- Cheerfully: “**God loves a cheerful giver**” (2 Corinthians 9:7).
- Expectantly: “**may He...supply and multiply the seed**” (2 Corinthians 9:10).

(2.5) The benefits of giving offerings are...

“Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness...For the administration of this service not only supplies the needs of the saints, but also is abounding through many thanksgivings to God...” (2 Corinthians 9:10-14).

- Giving matures us spiritually in Christ’s likeness: **“increase the fruits of your righteousness”** (v. 10). We reflect His generous nature.
- Giving meets our own need: **“bread for food”** (v. 10). We apply the principle of sowing and reaping, giving and receiving.
- Giving produces more than enough so that we can bless others: **“seed to the sower”** (v. 10). If you do not have money to give, it may be that you have not been sowing.
- Giving advances the Kingdom of God (vv. 11-14). Our giving enables the Gospel to be preached, the church to grow and the needy to experience the love of God.

(E) Prosperity.

(1) God desires that we prosper.

“I pray that you may prosper in all things and be in health, just as your soul prospers” (3 John 2).

(1.1) Biblical prosperity does not mean that we will all be rich with an abundance of material possessions. A desire to be rich is called greed! An obsession with material belongings is called materialism!

(1.2) ***Biblical prosperity is the ability to use God’s resources to meet the needs of humanity.*** Biblical prosperity refers to a quality of life in which all our need is met, and in which we have more than enough to help others in need (Philippians 4:19).

(1.3) Prosperity is not an end in itself; it is the result and overflow of a faithful and fruitful life in Christ. We will prosper in all things, **“just as [our] soul prospers”** (3 John 2).

(2) God does enable some to be financially rich.

(2.1) Some people have God-given talent to make large amounts of money, and some have the spiritual gift of giving, enabling them to give generously above the norm (Romans 12:8).

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- There is nothing wrong with a church or a Christian being rich. Abraham the “father of the faith” was extremely rich (Genesis 13:2), Paul carried on a lucrative tent making trade (Acts 18:3) and even Jesus needed a treasurer (John 12:6). There are some people who live off 10% of their income and give 90% of it away!
- (2.2) It is not impossible for a rich man to be saved; it is impossible for a person to be saved **if they will not surrender ownership of their riches to Jesus** (Luke 18:18-30). It is not how much we own that matters, **but how much owns us**. Oftentimes it is the poorest people who are most bound by money.
- Therefore, there is nothing wrong with a church being rich – but there is a problem if a church is poor! In the early church, there was no lack (Acts 2:45,4:34). God desires to prosper us and has designed the principles of prosperity: faithfully bringing the tithe to the storehouse and generously sowing offerings as the Spirit leads.
- (2.3) Being rich is not a sign of spirituality: contentment in Christ, secure in the gifting and abilities He has given us, is (Philippians 4:11-13; 1 Timothy 6:6).

This course is part of the Equipping Process.

For other resources please contact us...

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