



LESSONS & LETTERS



Welcome to Practice Ministries Bible studies for dads and kids. You're fulfilling one of the greatest privileges and responsibility a dad has - helping teach your kids God's Word - the Bible.

Lessons & Letters is designed to help you and your family put God's truths into practice everyday. This book and Let's Talk are a bit different than the others in our series, in that the lesson is shorter and the worksheet is more detailed and open-ended. What it means for you is that you and your child really have the opportunity to open up to each other through the discussion questions. You can download any worksheet in this book by going to the Bible Study Materials page on our website at: www.practiceministries.org.

We're always looking for ways to make this material better for your family, so please contact us with any questions or comments you have. Here's how you can reach us:

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PRACTICE MINISTRIES BIBLE STUDY CURRICULUM

LESSONS FROM DANIEL & PAUL & PRACTICE SESSION WORKSHEETS

JAIL MAIL: LETTERS FROM PAUL & PRACTICE SESSION WORKSHEETS

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Practice Ministries Bible Study Curriculum and Practice Session Worksheets
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BIBLE LESSON SUMMARIES

LESSONS & LETTERS

LESSONS FROM DANIEL & PAUL

Lesson 1: Success The Old Fashioned Way

“Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking young men,” he said. “Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted with knowledge and good sense, and have the poise needed to serve in the royal palace. Teach these young men the language and literature of the Babylonians” (Daniel 1:4).

Today we’re talking about how to become successful in today’s world and build godly character.

Practice Session 1 encourages you to put together a plan to help you succeed in God’s eyes.

Lesson 2: Soup D’Jour?

“But you, Timothy, belong to God; so run from all these evil things, and follow what is right and good. Pursue a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness” (1 Timothy 6:11).

Today we’re talking about how to influence the culture rather than being influenced by the culture.

Practice Session 2 encourages you to be an influencer and not an influenced.

Lesson 3: How To Win Friends & Influence People

“God blesses you when you are mocked and persecuted and lied about because you are my followers. ¹² Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted, too” (Matthew 5:11-12).

Today we’re talking about how to handle people that challenge us and make life difficult.

Practice Session 3 encourages you to follow Daniels’ example when dealing with difficult people.

Lesson 4: Swimming Against The Current

“It was by faith that Moses left the land of Egypt. He was not afraid of the king. Moses kept right on going because he kept his eyes on the one who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:26-27).

Today we’re talking about giving your life to The God rather than a god.

Practice Session 4 encourages you to honor God with your choices.

Lesson 5: Playing By The Rules

“The greatest among you must be a servant. ¹² But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Matthew 23:11-12).

Today we’re talking about relying not on what you have but on Who you have.

Practice Session 5 encourages you to live your life as a conscious act of worship to God.

Lesson 6: From Saul To Paul

“As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him! ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:3-4).

Today we’re talking about how God’s power changes lives.

Practice Session 6 encourages you to follow God’s example in what you do.

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Lesson 7: Amazing Grace

“But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ⁹ And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s judgment. ¹⁰ For since we were restored to friendship with God by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be delivered from eternal punishment by his life. ¹¹ So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God—all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in making us friends of God” (Romans 5:8-11).

Today we’re talking about one of Paul’s teachings: Grace – Receiving God’s undeserved favor.

Practice Session 7 encourages you live for the benefit of others.

Lesson 8: Completely Changed, Changed Completely

“Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us” (Romans 5:1).

Today we’re talking about two big words: justification & sanctification

Practice Session 8 encourages you to show God’s love to others.

Lesson 9: Having A Good Time By Having A Good Life

“My message came by a direct revelation from Jesus Christ himself. No one else taught me” (Galatians 1:12).

Today we’re talking about venturing out in the name of Jesus Christ.

Practice Session 9 encourages you to live by faith and not by sight.

Lesson 10: Paul’s Excellent Adventures

“For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—Jews first and also Gentiles” (Romans 1:16).

Today we’re talking about Paul’s adventures of faith and your adventure of faith.

Practice Session 10 encourages you ask God who is it that needs you.

JAIL MAIL: LETTERS FROM PAUL

Letter 1: The Story

“I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the wonderful future he has promised to those he called. I want you to realize what a rich and glorious inheritance he has given to his people. ¹⁹I pray that you will begin to understand the incredible greatness of his power for us who believe him” (Ephesians 1:18-19).

Today we’re talking about how God’s power changes lives.

Practice Session 1 encourages you to be an example to all believers in Jesus Christ.

Letter 2: The Battle

“Use every piece of God’s armor to resist the enemy in the time of evil, so that after the battle you will still be standing firm” (Ephesians 6:13).

Today we’re talking about the church and how the church is in the midst of a great battle.

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Practice Session 2 encourages you to put on spiritual armor.

Letter 3: The Heart

“And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God’s marvelous love” (Ephesians 3:17).
Today we’re talking about our heart where Christ wants to be more and more at home.

Practice Session 3 encourages you to do a bit of heart-makeover.

Letter 4: The Gift

“So we praise God for the wonderful kindness he has poured out on us because we belong to his dearly loved Son” (Ephesians 1:6).
Today we’re talking about God’s unchanging plan for your life.

Practice Session 4 encourages you to write a statement of intent of how you want to live your life in response to the grace God has given you.

Letter 5: The Call

“For though your hearts were once full of darkness, now you are full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it! ⁹ For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true” (Ephesians 5:8-9).
Today we’re talking about living a godly life.

Practice Session 5 encourages you to write a prayer based on Ephesians 4 & 5.

Letter 6: Living For Heaven

“This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. It is changing lives everywhere, just as it changed yours...” (Colossians 1:6).
Today we’re talking about giving yourself to God.

Practice Session 6 encourages you to live for heaven rather than for earth.

Letter 7: The “In-Crowd”

“For I live in eager expectation and hope that I will never do anything that causes me shame, but that I will always be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past, and that my life will always honor Christ, whether I live or I die” (Philippians 1:21)
Today we’re talking about living a “new life” and not the old.

Practice Session 7 encourages you to be bold for Jesus Christ and honor Him with your life.

Letter 8: Not Your Average Joe

“Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds...” (Hebrews 10:24).
Today we’re talking about encouraging others in word & deed.

Practice Session 8 encourages you be a “Barnabas.”

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Letter 9: Coming Alongside

“But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don’t be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you” (2 Timothy 4:5).

Today we’re talking about living in a way that others “catch” your faith.

Practice Session 9 encourages you to carry out the ministry God has given you.

Letter 10: For Him & By Him

“...I am the Lord’s servant, and I am willing to accept whatever he wants” (Mary’s response to the angel Gabriel - Luke 1:38).

Today we’re talking about allowing God to use you on His terms.

Practice Session 10 encourages you to live by God’s power.

BIBLE LESSONS

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Lessons From Daniel & Paul

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Jail Mail: Letters From Paul

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LESSON 1: SUCCESS – THE OLD FASHIONED WAY

In the 1980s a series of Smith-Barney TV commercials ended with their trademark phrase: “We make money the old fashioned way – we earn it!” Working hard to earn success - it was good advice then and it’s still good advice today.

But the world today doesn’t tell you that. It tells you that you can have what you want now. Don’t want to wait for it? Fine! No payments and no interest for 2 years. Order stuff on the internet and put it on credit; never mind that the bill is coming later (that’s another lesson for another day). You can have what you want and enjoy it now! But what the world says today really isn’t that new. Consider what King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon did 2,600 years ago:

“During the third year of King Jehoiakim’s reign in Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it with his armies. ² The Lord gave him victory over King Jehoiakim of Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon, he took with him some of the sacred objects from the Temple of God and placed them in the treasure-house of his god in the land of Babylonia. ³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, who was in charge of the palace officials, to bring to the palace some of the young men of Judah’s royal family and other noble families, who had been brought to Babylon as captives. ⁴ “Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking young men,” he said. “Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted with knowledge and good sense, and have the poise needed to serve in the royal palace. Teach these young men the language and literature of the Babylonians” (Daniel 1: 1-4).

Instant satisfaction. Instant enjoyment. That was King Neb’s mindset. “I’ll get what I want now and how I get it are just minor details. Why not? As long as it works for me, it’s OK!”

Daniel was an Israelite, living in the Southern Kingdom of Israel in the capital city of Jerusalem, swept up in an invasion and plopped smack-dab in the middle of a hostile and foreign world, forced to learn the ways and language of the culture so he could serve the king as an advisor. That’s how he spent his high-school years.

If Daniel lived in America today, he’d be an All-American. He was good looking, a good athlete, his family had money, he was on the dean’s list; and was probably voted most likely to succeed. He had it all and had it all going for him, and then he was spun out of control and crash –landed in a difficult situation. Daniel found himself in a culture that wanted to change him by getting Daniel to forget who he was and forget His God by changing Him into its image: **“Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah. ⁷ The chief official renamed them with these Babylonian names: Daniel was called Belteshazzar. Hananiah was called Shadrach. Mishael was called Meshach. Azariah was called Abednego” (Daniel 1: 6-7).**

You haven’t been dragged off into some foreign country, but there is a world around you trying to drag you into its way of thinking and doing things. The world today says, “Look out for # 1. There is no right or wrong except what’s right for you. Serve yourself and you’ll get ahead.” This is the world you live in. But remember – you don’t belong to the world. You belong to Jesus: **“I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word” (John 17:6).** You don’t have to give in to the world’s mind-set to succeed. Daniel 1:4 shows how you can survive and succeed in a world that hates God and still be faithful to God:

“Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking young men,” he said. Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted with knowledge and good sense, and have the poise needed to serve in the royal palace. Teach these young men the language and literature of the Babylonians.”

Be healthy: Daniel took good care of himself physically.

Be knowledgeable: Early in life, Daniel learned wisdom – God’s definition of what’s right and applied it in making every-day decisions.

Be well versed in learning: He was a good student, taking advantage of his opportunity to be well educated. He worked hard at his studies.

Learn common sense: Daniel had good common sense. He made good decisions at the right time.

In short, Daniel took advantage of every opportunity to put himself into a position to succeed. What was the outcome of Daniel’s work ethic? **“Now God had given the chief official great respect for Daniel” (Daniel 1:9).** Daniel was a favorite of the royal court – sort of a teacher’s pet – but in a good way. God gave Daniel certain gifts & abilities that led him into favor with the king’s officials for God’s purposes: **“God gave these four young men an unusual aptitude for learning the literature and science of the time” (Daniel 1:17).** Where God wants you to succeed, he will give you special aptitude or understanding in those areas of study. It’s up to you to discover what area you’re gifted in and develop those abilities so you can serve God where He places you.

If you want to succeed and gain the respect of others, it’s no different today than it was in Daniel’s day 2,600 years ago. The Bible says: **“Work hard, but not just to please your masters when they are watching. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. ⁷ Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people” (Ephesians 6:6-7).** Work hard. Work with enthusiasm. It doesn’t mean work more. It means giving your best effort while you’re studying or in the classroom. Take care of yourself physically so you can work hard. Take advantage of the opportunity of getting a good education. Use good judgment. Make decisions that will help you and not harm you. This gives you the best opportunity for success.

Above all, understand that God brings you into favor with others to accomplish His purposes. Wherever God places you, thank Him by reflecting His love and kindness to those around you. It will reflect well upon you, and that will lead to favor with others, and that leads to earning success the old fashioned way.

PRACTICE SESSION 1: SUCCESS – THE OLD FASHIONED WAY

Daniel 1:1-4

“During the third year of King Jehoiakim’s reign in Judah, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it with his armies. ² The Lord gave him victory over King Jehoiakim of Judah. When Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon, he took with him some of the sacred objects from the Temple of God and placed them in the treasure-house of his god in the land of Babylonia. ³ Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, who was in charge of the palace officials, to bring to the palace some of the young men of Judah’s royal family and other noble families, who had been brought to Babylon as captives. ⁴ “Select only strong, healthy, and good-looking young men,” he said. “Make sure they are well versed in every branch of learning, are gifted with knowledge and good sense, and have the poise needed to serve in the royal palace. Teach these young men the language and literature of the Babylonians.”

1) After Daniel was taken to Babylon he was given a new name. What does your name mean to you? When people hear your name, what do you want to be known for?

2) What steps does Daniel 1:4 outline for being successful?

3) Which one of these steps do you feel you’re doing a good job with? What steps do you feel you need to work on?

4) Write down some steps you can take to shore up the area you need to work on.

5) What is one way God helps you accomplish the purpose He has for you? (Daniel 1:17).

6) Who allows you to gain favor with others? (Daniel 1:9).

7) What practical advice does Ephesians 6:6-7 give you for success?

8) What are some challenges you face as a Christian living in today’s culture?

9) How can you make an impact on today’s culture for Jesus Christ?

Good Words To Remember:

“Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people” (Ephesians 6:7).

LESSON 2: SOUP D'JOUR?

“The king assigned them a daily ration of the best food and wine from his own kitchens. They were to be trained for a three-year period, and then some of them would be made his advisers in the royal court. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah. ⁷ The chief official renamed them with these Babylonian names: Daniel was called Belteshazzar. Hananiah was called Shadrach. Mishael was called Meshach. Azariah was called Abednego. ⁸ But Daniel made up his mind not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief official for permission to eat other things instead. ⁹ Now God had given the chief official great respect for Daniel. ¹⁰ But he was alarmed by Daniel’s suggestion. “My lord the king has ordered that you eat this food and wine,” he said. “If you become pale and thin compared to the other youths your age, I am afraid the king will have me beheaded for neglecting my duties.” ¹¹ Daniel talked it over with the attendant who had been appointed by the chief official to look after Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah” (Daniel 1:5-11).

Daniel and his buddies - you know them better as Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego – were offered the world - the best food, the best accommodations, the best education in the kingdom. Most would jump at the chance to have the world. But it came at a price. The price meant forsaking their God. Daniel and his friends chose to remain loyal to God. They made the decision to remain “a peculiar people.” Rather than be influenced by the culture around him, they decided to flavor and influence the culture.

While they were learning how to help King Neb run His kingdom, they were offered the same food the King ate – think McDonalds, Taco Bell, Pizza Hut, KFC, & Dairy Queen (for dessert) three time a day for three years. Daniel & his buds decided not to eat the “royal food” for a couple of reasons: it wasn’t very healthful & God forbade certain foods from their diet.

But this was bigger than just food. This was all about honoring God and remaining faithful to Him. Daniel and his friends may have been in the world of Babylon, but they did not have to be of the Babylonian world. They retained the honor of being “a peculiar people.” They decided to be influencers – not influenced.

While you don’t have the choice of living in an increasingly ungodly world – you do have the choice of whether you will be of this world. The Bible says: **“They [believers in Jesus Christ] are not part of this world any more than I [Jesus] am. ¹⁷ Make them pure and holy by teaching them your words of truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world. ¹⁹ And I give myself entirely to you so they also might be entirely yours” (John 17:16-19).**

Jesus wants you to be in the world but not of the world: **“But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God’s holy nation, his very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).** You are called to be an influencer - not an influenced.

The Bible says, **“You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor?” (Matthew 5:13).** Salt permeates, flavors, and preserves. When salt comes into contact with food, it immediately makes an impact. It mixes in and without much fanfare begins to flavor. The salt does not take on the flavor of the food, rather it flavors the food. And the taste is unmistakable.

Salt is of no use in the salt shaker. Likewise, you have to decide whether you're going to be conformed to the image of an ungodly culture or be the one living a distinct lifestyle that will make people sit up and take notice of who Jesus is and help preserve this country's godly heritage. Daniel decided to be "salty" – an influencer. You can make that same decision – to be an influencer rather than an influenced.

But it's hard to be salty alone. Daniel very possibly had read King Solomon's words: **"A person standing alone can be attacked and defeated, but two can stand back-to-back and conquer. Three are even better, for a triple-braided cord is not easily broken"** (Ecclesiastes 4:12). He knew he had a better chance of succeeding if he didn't go it alone. He surrounded himself with those who would stand with him, and would encourage & strengthen each other to stand firm.

Daniel 1:8 gives us the key to living in the world but not being of the world: **"But Daniel made up his mind not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king. He asked the chief official for permission to eat other things instead."** Daniel did not allow the temptation to give into the flow of the culture to get near him. He never went near the bait. In fact, he had the bait removed from his presence. The best way to not to be worldly influenced is to avoid an influencing situation as completely as possible. The Bible says, **"But you, Timothy, belong to God; so run from all these evil things, and follow what is right and good. Pursue a godly life, along with faith, love, perseverance, and gentleness"** (1 Timothy 6:11).

Soup D'Jour – the Soup of the day. At times, it will not be easy for you to resist what the world's menu has to offer. At times it will look pretty good to you. At times you'll be tempted to throw good sense out the window and order from the menu. But there's no such thing as a free lunch. Always keep in mind the cost of what's on the menu. Chances are you don't want the bill.

There's a cost of being a follower of Jesus too, but tremendous rewards await you if you will stand firm – being an influencer and not an influenced: **"No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it is painful! But afterward there will be a quiet harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way. ¹² So take a new grip with your tired hands and stand firm on your shaky legs. ¹³ Mark out a straight path for your feet. Then those who follow you, though they are weak and lame, will not stumble and fall but will become strong"** (Hebrews 12:11-13).

PRACTICE SESSION 2: SOUP D'JOUR?

“The king assigned them a daily ration of the best food and wine from his own kitchens. They were to be trained for a three-year period, and then some of them would be made his advisers in the royal court. Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah were four of the young men chosen, all from the tribe of Judah. ⁷ The chief official renamed them with these Babylonian names: Daniel was called Belteshazzar. Hananiah was called Shadrach. Mishael was called Meshach. Azariah was called Abednego. ⁸ But Daniel made up his mind not to defile himself by eating the food and wine given to them by the king” (Daniel 1:5-8).

1) Daniel found himself surrounded by an ungodly culture. How could being surrounded in an increasingly ungodly culture affect you?

2) What was one step Daniel took to retain his godly heritage (v 8)?

3) What are some temptations the world offers you as a dad?

4) What are some temptations the world offers you as a teen-ager?

5) How does 1 Timothy 6:11 help you avoid temptation?

6) How does Ecclesiastes 4:12 help you be an influencer of the culture around you, rather than an influenced?

7) How does Hebrews 12:11-13 encourage you to be an influencer rather than an influenced?

8) What are ways that you can be an influencer for Jesus Christ rather than being influenced by the world?

Good Words To Remember

“You are a kingdom of priests, God’s holy nation, his very own possession” (1 Peter 2:9).

LESSON 3: HOW TO WIN FRIENDS & INFLUENCE PEOPLE

“God blesses you when you are mocked and persecuted and lied about because you are my followers. ¹² Be happy about it! Be very glad! For a great reward awaits you in heaven. And remember, the ancient prophets were persecuted, too” (Matthew 5:11-12).

Following Jesus Christ is difficult. It’s against our nature to live God’s ways. We want to live in a Burger King world where you can “have it your way.” But Jesus puts it to us this way: **“If any of you wants to be my follower you must put aside your selfish ambition, shoulder your cross, and follow me” (Mark 8:34).** We live in a world today that encourages you to live the way you want to, not willingly deny yourself the lifestyle and desires (Ephesians 5:3-4) that Jesus says are improper for His followers.

Jesus tells us plainly as Christians, there will be times when people will challenge us and make life difficult. At times such challenges may seem overwhelming because you don’t know how to handle them. Thankfully, there’s Daniel.

Read Daniel Chapter 2: 1-30. Within these verses, God has given us a model on how to win friends and influence people.

1) When faced with a seemingly overwhelming attack, Daniel did not panic or get upset (v 14-15). Daniel knew that God was in control of the situation and would use even a king’s dream for His glory.

God is in control of every situation you’re going through. He’s never been or will be out of control. Remember, your life is all about bringing honor to Him: **“But we know that there is only one God, the Father, who created everything, and we exist for him” (1 Corinthians 8:6)** and He reserves the right to use you for His purposes. There are times that it will be necessary in God’s plan for you to pass through rough waters: **“These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world” (1 Peter 1:7).** When you’re in a difficult situation, find out as much as you can about what’s going on before acting.

2) Daniel went straight to his house and asked his friends to pray with him (v 17-18). Sometimes it’s humbling to go to a friend and ask her to pray with you – but those that will pray with you are your best friends. And if you will humble yourself and ask others to pray with and for you, you do yourself and others good.

3) Daniel knew how to pray (v 18). He asked God to show him mercy. Mercy is not receiving a punishment you deserve. God has dominion over all of us and doesn’t owe us anything. Every good thing we receive from God is a gift. So what you’re doing when you ask something of God, is asking for His mercy and His good gifts. Whatever you pray for, ask God for His mercy upon what you’re talking to Him about.

4) He praised God (v 20-23). Daniel’s prayer turned into praise. Daniel gives to God the honor that God alone deserves.

When Daniel came to the King to tell him the meaning of His dream, Daniel did 3 things that served him well:

1) Daniel approached the king with respect (v 27-28). The Bible says, **“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but harsh words stir up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).** Daniel was not out from under the King’s anger yet, and knew the likeliest way to defuse his anger was by a respectful and gentle tone of voice. It worked then and it’s still a good idea today.

2) Daniel humbled himself before God and before the king. Humbleness is power under control. Even though he was highly favored and honored by both the king and by God, it was good that Daniel lowered himself that God alone may have all the praise. Even though Daniel had the upper-hand here, he did not use his advantage to get the king to serve him: **“Don’t be selfish; don’t live to make a good impression on others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourself” (Philippians 2:3).**

3) Daniel gave God all the praise v (27-30). It’s wise to acknowledge that God is the one who gives you wisdom: **“Dear brothers and sisters, when I first came to you I didn’t use lofty words and brilliant ideas to tell you God’s message. ² For I decided to concentrate only on Jesus Christ and his death on the cross. ³ I came to you in weakness—timid and trembling. ⁴ And my message and my preaching were very plain. I did not use wise and persuasive speeches, but the Holy Spirit was powerful among you. ⁵ I did this so that you might trust the power of God rather than human wisdom” (1 Corinthians 2:1-5).** Rely upon God’s power rather than your own words when trying to get your point of view across to another – not just in matters of faith but in all persuasion.

Jesus tells us plainly: **“Here on earth you will have many trials and sorrows. But take heart, because I have overcome the world” (John 16:33).** Daniel faced a challenge with a person who was very difficult to handle. When you’re faced with such a challenge, remember that you have help from the One who has the power to bring you through a difficult situation with honor, and in so doing, bring honor to Himself.

PRACTICE SESSION 3: HOW TO WIN FRIENDS & INFLUENCE PEOPLE

“...Praise the name of God forever and ever, for he alone has all wisdom and power. ²¹ He determines the course of world events; he removes kings and sets others on the throne. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the scholars. ²² He reveals deep and mysterious things and knows what lies hidden in darkness, though he himself is surrounded by light. ²³ I thank and praise you, God of my ancestors, for you have given me wisdom and strength. You have told me what we asked of you and revealed to us what the king demanded” (Daniel 2:20-23).

1) What does Jesus tell us we need to do if we are going to live by His ways? (Mark 8:34).

2) Dad: What tends to get in your way of you following Jesus fully?

3) Girls : What tends to get in your way of following Jesus fully?

Replace “shoulder your cross” with your answer in 2 or 3 above and pray Mark 8:34 for each other this week.

4) When you are challenged by a person making life difficult for you, what are some ways that Daniel chapter 2 shows you how to handle that person?

_____ (v 14-15)
_____ (v 17-18)
_____ (v 27-28)
_____ (Proverbs 15:1)

5) What was Daniel’s immediate response to God’s help? _____ (v 20-23)

6) In verse 27-30, Daniel had the upper hand yet he chose to humble himself before the king and God. Why was it to his advantage to do this?

7) What is the best way to talk with someone who is difficult to be around? (1 Corinthians 2:5).

8) Why does God allow you to go through difficult and challenging situations? (1 Peter 1:7).

Good Words To Remember

“These trials are only to test your faith, to show that it is strong and pure. It is being tested as fire tests and purifies gold—and your faith is far more precious to God than mere gold. So if your faith remains strong after being tried by fiery trials, it will bring you much praise and glory and honor on the day when Jesus Christ is revealed to the whole world” (1 Peter 1:7).

LESSON 4: SWIMMING AGAINST THE CURRENT

“He [Moses] thought it was better to suffer for the sake of the Messiah than to own the treasures of Egypt, for he was looking ahead to the great reward that God would give him. ²⁷ It was by faith that Moses left the land of Egypt. He was not afraid of the king. Moses kept right on going because he kept his eyes on the one who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:26-27).

Read Daniel Chapter 3.

Throughout the Bible, God has made it clear not to bow down before idols: **“...Do not worship any other gods or bow before them or serve them or offer sacrifices to them” (2 Kings 17:35).** “That’s an easy one” we say. “We can check off number 2 on the top 10 list. We don’t go around worshiping statues or carved images.” But we do.

Question: What is an idol? An idol is anything or anyone that we put on the throne in our lives that rules us.

Question: Why is God so up tight about idols? Because once we move God off the throne, it’s hard to get Him back on. Reread 2 Kings 17:35. God says once we begin to flirt with an idol (bow before) we end up making that idol more and more a part of our lives (serve them) until we finally give our lives and full attention to it (sacrifice to them).

God’s primary purpose for your life is to be a Son-reflector – to reflect His light to people living in darkness so they can see Him and come to Him. If something or someone else is on the throne in your life, all your attention is focused there and that’s what you’ll end up reflecting.

The Bible says, **“Do not misuse the name of the LORD your God. The LORD will not let you go unpunished if you misuse his name” (Exodus 20:7).** If you tell people that you are a Christian and committed to Jesus Christ, and then you turn around and lie or cheat, or blow off worship because, doggone it, you and your idols stayed up too late and are too tired to get up and give an hour to God, your light becomes dim and your actions say to others that your commitment to God isn’t as important as whatever or whoever is currently on the throne. The God becomes less and less in your life, while your god becomes greater and greater.

Question: So what do you do when idols show up? Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego were put into a difficult situation. They had to either choose The God or a god. It came down not to what they chose but Who they chose. There’s another man who had to choose between The God and a god. It also came down not to what he chose but Who he chose.

In 1924, Eric Liddell was England’s best hope ever to win a gold medal in the 100-meter race at the Olympic Games in Paris, France. But he refused to run. The first heats of the 100-meter were scheduled on Sunday, and Eric said, “I don’t run on Sundays. Sunday is for worshiping God, not sports. At least for me.”

The British officials tried to get the schedule changed, but without success. Some called him stupid. Some called him a traitor. But Eric stuck to a promise he made to honor Sunday as the Lord’s Day, to rest from work and sports. As the first heats of the 100-meter were being run, Eric was speaking at a Scottish church about his commitment to Jesus Christ.

Though not his best event, Eric did qualify for the 400-meter race and made it to the finals. Just before the final race, a trainer handed him a note that said, **“He that honors me I will honor” (1 Samuel 2:30).** Eric won the 400-meter race – not his best event – in world record time! Criticism turned into admiration and respect for the man who lived by what he believed.¹

Jesus said, **“They [His followers] are not part of this world any more than I am. ¹⁷ Make them pure and holy by teaching them your words of truth. ¹⁸ As you sent me into the world, I am sending them into the world” (John 17:16-18).** The world of sports Eric Liddell lived in demanded his worship. While Eric was in that world he chose not to be of it. He said, “No” to the world and he paid a price. But for Eric the cost of paying the price was not too big. Eric would tell you that as a Christian you can choose the world, but you’ll cheapen God’s name and your own.

The Bible says, **“Care for the flock of God entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. ³ Don’t lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your good example. ⁴ And when the head Shepherd comes, your reward will be a never-ending share in his glory and honor” (1 Peter 5:2-4).** As A Christian, God has entrusted His name to you for the benefit of those He has placed around you. He has called you to stand up against idols and lead those around you by your example. But occasionally someone who is unreasonable will “lord it over you” and challenge your commitment to choose God.

Question: How did Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego handle an unreasonable person (v 13-15)?

The Bible says, **“O Nebuchadnezzar, we do not need to defend ourselves before you. ¹⁷ If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God whom we serve is able to save us. He will rescue us from your power, Your Majesty. ¹⁸ But even if he doesn’t, Your Majesty can be sure that we will never serve your gods or worship the gold statue you have set up” (Daniel 3:16-18).** They swam against the current.

- 1) Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego did not insult or blow up at the king. They respectfully gave their answer and stood by it.
- 2) They didn’t hesitate in their answer. They didn’t flirt with temptation. Their choice was clear despite the intended consequences. If you want to avoid idols, don’t toy with them by seeing how close you can come without stepping over the line. Do not hesitate. Stand by your God.
- 3) They trusted in the Living God. The key to swimming against the current is to remember Whose you are. If you have devoted yourself to His honor – you must swim against the current. God is able to deliver you out of any situation. But know that if He doesn’t deliver you, then there is a greater purpose and good to come out of your situation. Keep your eye on the One who is invisible.

Don’t be ashamed or afraid of your commitment to God. If you want to honor your commitment to live for Jesus Christ and for His glory then you must choose not to do evil so that good may come: **“Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God?” (Galatians 1:10).** Making the decision to honor God by choosing Him over anything or anyone that wants your allegiance in small ways will prepare you to choose God when (not if but when) larger tests arrive.

By choosing to swim against the current, Shadrach, Meshach & Abednego brought honor to God, and God brought honor to them: **“Then the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego to even higher positions in the province of Babylon” (v 30).** By choosing to swim against the current, God honored Eric Liddell by turning criticism into admiration and respect because he lived for The God and not a god. By choosing to swim against the current, you’ll bring honor to The God instead of a god, and God will honor you.

¹ Adapted from Hero Tales, by Dave & Neta Jackson, Bethany House, 1997, pp. 81-88).

PRACTICE SESSION 4: SWIMMING AGAINST THE CURRENT

“But suddenly, as he was watching, Nebuchadnezzar jumped up in amazement and exclaimed to his advisers, “Didn’t we tie up three men and throw them into the furnace?”

“Yes,” they said, “we did indeed, Your Majesty.” ²⁵ “Look!” Nebuchadnezzar shouted. “I see four men, unbound, walking around in the fire. They aren’t even hurt by the flames! And the fourth looks like a divine being” (v 24-25).

1) Girls: How would you choose to handle the following situations that may go against your beliefs or convictions?

A crowd of school friends pressure you to compromise your standards of physical purity:

Your soccer team plays regularly on Sunday and often times on Sunday mornings:

You’re at a party at a friend’s house and some of the girls begin to get into mom’s prescription medicine and “dare” you with it:

Harry Potter is assigned reading for class:

You’re at a sleep-over and conversation turns into bashing a girl at school:

2) Dad: What situation have you encountered where you had the opportunity to gain, but would have been against your beliefs or convictions to do so?

3) Girls: What’s out there in the world that you tend to give a lot of attention to?

4) Dad: What’s out there in the world that you tend to give a lot of attention to?

5) Both: How can you “idol-proof” yourself from what you listed above? (1 Peter 5:2-4).

Jesus went into the fire to save us from having to go through. When He asks for your loyalty, will you choose Him?

Good Words To Remember

“Care for the flock of God entrusted to you. Watch over it willingly, not grudgingly—not for what you will get out of it, but because you are eager to serve God. ³ Don’t lord it over the people assigned to your care, but lead them by your good example” (1 Peter 5:2-3).

LESSON 5: PLAYING BY THE RULES

“Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness” (Psalm 115:1).

Read Daniel Chapter 4

Most likely while growing up your parents have taught you to follow the rules. There are mom & dad rules: do your homework before dinner; eat your vegetables; there are school rules: no running in the halls; abide by the honor code, there are government rules: click-it or ticket; pay your taxes; there are physical rules: the second law of thermodynamics says that order tends toward disorder over time (it’s what causes your room to disintegrate into a total pit 15 minutes after you clean it). It shouldn’t be a surprise then that there are spiritual rules.

One spiritual rule says: **“My feet stand on level ground; in the great assembly I will praise the Lord” (Psalm 26:12)**. Praising God brings you into His presence. When you are in God’s presence He can instruct and set you on a good path because you are listening. Here’s the opposite spiritual rule: **“The arrogant (bigheaded/self-important) cannot stand in your presence” (Psalm 5:5)**. Arrogance or pride removes you from God’s presence.

It also shouldn’t be a surprise that everyone bends or breaks the rules to a degree:

- “I’ll buy my research paper off the Internet.”
- “I’ll get my older sister to buy us the beer.”
- The speed limit is 65 but I’ll keep it around 70.
- It’s only cheating if I’m caught.

Question: Why do we bend the rules? It’s called pride or arrogance. It’s deciding that the rules are inconvenient or you’re an exception. And it’s natural to do that because it’s in our nature to disobey: **“All of us have strayed away like sheep. We have left God’s paths to follow our own” (Isaiah 53:6)**. But just because it’s natural and “everyone is doing it” doesn’t make it right.

What does God have to say about pride and arrogance? **“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say, “Who can bring me down to the ground?” (Obadiah 1:3)**. Pride deceives you into relying upon possessions & yourself.

King Nebuchadnezzar can tell you how pride & arrogance gets a foothold in your life: **“I, Nebuchadnezzar, was living in my palace in comfort and prosperity” (Daniel 4:4)**. Comfortable palaces. Who needs God when you live in a comfortable palace? The first step to removing yourself from God’s presence is to rely upon what you have for your provision, not upon Who provides for you.

This world says your value as a girl depends on your looks, your body shape, how you dress, what accessories you have, or what kind of car you have. It’s what you’ve heard from day one and you learned it by the time you were 6-years old. What’s been drilled into your head is also a lie. Your health, wealth, & possessions, are all temporary and can be taken away at any time – sadly, the residents of New Orleans found this out. The true source of peace, happiness and contentment comes from knowing that you are valuable to God. But if you continue to believe and live by what the world tells you, you will remove yourself farther and farther from God’s presence. God will not bless what is not His. If you insist on not playing by your rules, God will get your attention.

Question: How can you keep pride & arrogance out of your life? You can’t. But you can learn to control it through praising God and being humble. Being humble means throwing off

pride & arrogance. It's natural to move toward relying on yourself to gain acceptance and popularity and success. It's easy to begin thinking like King Nebuchadnezzar: "...**Just look at this great city of Babylon! I, by my own mighty power, have built this beautiful city as my royal residence and as an expression of my royal splendor**" (Daniel 4:30).

It's not natural to throw off the very thing that you're inclined to do. But by moving toward relying on God rather than relying on yourself is how God says you will be honored: "**He guides the humble in what is right and teaches them his way. This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word**" (Isaiah 66:2).

The first step toward becoming humble is to willingly place yourself under God's authority: "**if my people who are called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sins and heal their land**" (2 Chronicles 7:14). When you submit yourself to God, you put yourself in the proper place to receive His favor.

Pride says: "God, bless what I'm doing." Humbleness says: "God – make me a part of what you are blessing." If you want honor, if you want to be great, then humble yourself: "**The greatest among you must be a servant. ¹² But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted**" (Matthew 23:11-12). Lower yourself to become greater? This makes no sense to the world, but then God never does what the world wants Him to.

Perhaps the biggest challenge you'll have as a Christian young woman is overcoming the natural tendency to trust in what you have rather than Who you have: "**I call to the Lord, who is worthy of praise, and I am saved from my enemies**" (2 Samuel 22:4). It's when you learn to praise God that you will be saved from the enemies of pride and arrogance. Humble yourself: "**Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory...**" and He will exalt you: "**God sets himself against the proud, but he shows favor to the humble. ⁶ So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and in his good time he will honor you**" (1 Peter 5:5-6).

PRACTICE SESSION 5: PLAYING BY THE RULES

“Your attitude should be the same that Christ Jesus had. ⁶ Though he was God, he did not demand and cling to his rights as God. ⁷ He made himself nothing; he took the humble position of a slave and appeared in human form. ⁸ And in human form he obediently humbled himself even further by dying a criminal’s death on a cross. ⁹ Because of this, God raised him up to the heights of heaven and gave him a name that is above every other name, ¹⁰ so that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Philippians 2:5-11).

1) Girls: What are some rules that have been set down in your home?

2) Girls: What are some rules that have been set down in your school?

3) Dads: What are some rules that have set down in your work?

4) Both: What are some rules that God wants you to live by?

5) Both: For each rule mentioned above, how can each be a conscious act of praise & worship?

6) Both: What does pride & arrogance do for you? (Psalm 5:5).

7) Both: Read Daniel 4:4. What comfortable palaces are in your life?

8) Both: What’s the benefit of praising God? (Psalm 26:12, Samuel 22:4).

9) Both: Read Matthew 23:11-13. What are some areas in which you can be a servant?

Good Words To Remember:

“The greatest among you must be a servant. ¹² But those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted” (Matthew 23:11-12).

LESSON 6: FROM SAUL TO PAUL

“As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him! ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?” (Acts 9:3-4).

Read: Acts 6:1-7; 8:1-3; 9:1-7

Question: Who’s the worst person you can think of (not counting brothers or sisters)? Why?

Christ had been raised. Before Christ ascended back to the Father in heaven, He gave His disciples a promise and a charge: **“But when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, you will receive power and will tell people about me everywhere—in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8).**

A few days later, what Jesus said would happen, did: **“On the day of Pentecost, seven weeks after Jesus’ resurrection, the believers were meeting together in one place. ² Suddenly, there was a sound from heaven like the roaring of a mighty windstorm in the skies above them, and it filled the house where they were meeting. ³ Then, what looked like flames or tongues of fire appeared and settled on each of them. ⁴ And everyone present was filled with the Holy Spirit and began speaking in other languages, as the Holy Spirit gave them this ability” (Acts 2:1-4).** The Spirit had come! The disciples received the power Jesus had promised them to help them tell people everywhere about Him! The Church was born!

And the new church flourished: **“And all the believers met together constantly and shared everything they had. ⁴⁵ They sold their possessions and shared the proceeds with those in need. ⁴⁶ They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity—⁴⁷ all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people. And each day the Lord added to their group those who were being saved” (Acts 2:44-47).** But along with the joy & goodwill came dissension. Some began complaining that their group was not being cared for as well as another. The apostles felt their duty lay with preaching the gospel, not administering a food program. So they found help in caring for all the charity needs of a growing church community.

Seven godly, well respected men were elected to help meet the needs of those who came to the church for help. One of these men was named Stephen. The Bible describes him as full of faith and the Holy Spirit. He was completely sold out for Jesus Christ.

Have you ever noticed that when someone shines brightly, there are some who try to bring her down to their level? Well, not all Jews accepted this new group called “Christians.” They decided that since they weren’t going to join them, they may as well beat them.

Stephen boldly preached God’s message, debating the Jewish leaders openly. Who else would make a better target? “If we can’t go up against him and win,” the Jewish leaders said, “We’ll win by taking him down.” So with stories and lies made up against him, Stephen was taken out and killed. And Saul was there, giving approval to his death.

Let Saul introduce himself to you: **“I was circumcised when I was eight days old, having been born into a pure-blooded Jewish family that is a branch of the tribe of Benjamin. So I am a real Jew if there ever was one! What’s more, I was a member of the Pharisees, who demand the strictest obedience to the Jewish law. ⁶ And zealous? Yes, in fact, I harshly persecuted the church. And I obeyed the Jewish law so carefully that I was never accused of any fault” (Philippians 3:5-6).**

LESSONS & LETTERS

Saul was Israel's American Idol. He was a Jew's Jew. If they had Wheaties in first century Jerusalem Saul would have been on the cover. Saul was not about to let a bunch of nuts called "The Way" have it "their way" with Jewish history and heritage. Not if he could help it.

So, to the first Christians, Saul of Tarsus became the worst enemy they ever had or could have. The Bible says that Saul wanted to destroy Christians (Acts 8:1-3). Sadly, right now in China, North Korea, several countries in the Middle East, and many other countries - people will be arrested or killed because they are Christians. Saul wanted to destroy this new movement called "The Way." Saul wanted to destroy Christianity in its infancy. Saul wanted to destroy Christians.

Saul was just doing what he thought any good Jew should do. He was doing what he thought was right. He was doing this to honor God! Saul was on a mission from God - it's just that it turned out differently from the way he originally planned!

Question: Have you ever done the wrong thing thinking it was the right thing? Missed a meeting because you were told the wrong date or time? Tried to be helpful but it backfired on you? Got some wrong information and said something that wasn't true? Broke a rule that you didn't know was a rule? This is completely different than knowing what is right and choosing to do wrong. You were misinformed and acted on that misinformation.

There are a lot of people who act on misinformation. Think about 9-11. The guys who flew their planes into the World Trade Center and Pentagon were absolutely right in doing what they did – according to their information and faith and their sense of duty to their god. Were they right? They would say, "Yes." Most would say, "No." So who is right? Who's to say what's right? How do you know what's right and what's wrong? What's appropriate and what's inappropriate? What's evil or what's good? Who is well-informed or misinformed?

Question: Is there any One, Single Source of Truth that is The Standard for Truth that is for all people at all times?

The Bible says, **"This is what he showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall that had been built true to plumb, with a plumb line in his hand. ⁸ And the LORD asked me, "What do you see, Amos?" "A plumb line," I replied. Then the Lord said, "Look, I am setting a plumb line among my people Israel" (Amos 7:7).** A plumb-line helps a bricklayer build the wall straight and true. It is the standard that everything is measured against. God has set The Plumb-Line in our midst that all people at all times may check to see what is right and true. His name is Jesus Christ. Saul came face-to-face with The Plumb-Line and saw that he was not doing what was right. He was misinformed. He saw the light and knew the truth. Saul became Paul.

At the start of this lesson, the question was asked, "Who's the worst person you can think of? Is it Saul of Tarsus; Adolph Hitler; Saddam Hussein; Osama bin-Laden?" Would you be mad if any of these guys were pardoned – forgiven of their crimes? Pardoned for destroying millions of innocent people? Would it upset you if I told you that even after doing the horrible things they did, God would forgive them if they asked His forgiveness and turned away from their former life? If they were pardoned, it wouldn't happen because they became so good. It would happen because God's so good.

The story of Saul of Tarsus who became the Apostle Paul is a story of God's goodness, not just for one man, but also for you and me. We'll continue the story of God's goodness in the next lesson by looking at one of Paul's most important messages: grace

PRACTICE SESSION 6: FROM SAUL TO PAUL

“Meanwhile, Saul was uttering threats with every breath. He was eager to destroy the Lord’s followers, so he went to the high priest. ² He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains. ³ As he was nearing Damascus on this mission, a brilliant light from heaven suddenly beamed down upon him! ⁴ He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?” ⁵ “Who are you, sir?” Saul asked. And the voice replied, “I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! ⁶ Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you are to do” (Acts 9:1-5).

1) Dad: Have you ever felt or seen God’s power at work in your life?

2) Dad: Can you point to a change in you since asking Jesus Christ into your life?

3) Kids: Has there been a time that someone has done something wrong to you and you forgave that person? What was their reaction?

4) Sometimes we act on being misinformed. What resources are available to you when you have an important decision to make?

5) Read Amos 7:7. Imagine a wall. It’s straight and true. Now look at the foundational qualities you’re building your life upon. Can you say you’re building your life by The Plumb-Line that is Jesus Christ? Are there some areas that need some straightening up? Ask God to help you.

“Don’t use foul or abusive language. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. ³⁰ And do not bring sorrow to God’s Holy Spirit by the way you live. Remember, he is the one who has identified you as his own, guaranteeing that you will be saved on the day of redemption. ³¹ Get rid of all bitterness, rage, anger, harsh words, and slander, as well as all types of malicious behavior. ³² Instead, be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God through Christ has forgiven you. Follow God’s example in everything you do, because you are his dear children. ² Live a life filled with love for others, following the example of Christ, who loved you and gave himself as a sacrifice to take away your sins. And God was pleased, because that sacrifice was like sweet perfume to him. ³ Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God’s people. ⁴ Obscene stories, foolish talk, and coarse jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God.”

6) Kids Pray Ephesians 4:29-5:4 for yourself and your friends this week.

7) Dads Pray Ephesians 4:29-5:4 over your family this week.

Good Words To Remember

“Follow God’s example in everything you do, because you are his dear children” (Ephesians 5:1).

LESSON 7: AMAZING GRACE

“But God showed his great love for us by sending Christ to die for us while we were still sinners. ⁹ And since we have been made right in God’s sight by the blood of Christ, he will certainly save us from God’s judgment. ¹⁰ For since we were restored to friendship with God by the death of his Son while we were still his enemies, we will certainly be delivered from eternal punishment by his life. ¹¹ So now we can rejoice in our wonderful new relationship with God—all because of what our Lord Jesus Christ has done for us in making us friends of God” (Romans 5:8-11).

Read Acts 9:1-20

John Newton: a) Invented the fig Newton
b) Married Olivia-Newton-John
c) Discovered gravity
d) Wrote a popular song that you can also sing to the tune of Gilligan’s Island

If you still don’t know who John Newton is, you have heard his very popular song – and you can sing it to Gilligan’s Island. Here’s his story:

John Newton’s life was as ruined and wrecked as the battered ship he was trying to steer through the storm. He had lived at sea from the time he was 11 years old. While sailors were not noted for their refined manners, his profanity, coarseness, and wild living shocked even these men.

Not only had Newton rejected his mother’s teachings of the Bible, he even led other sailors into unbelief. Certainly he was beyond hope and beyond saving, even if the Scriptures were true. Yet, his thoughts slowly began to turn to Jesus Christ. And one day at the helm, March 21, 1748, “...the Lord sent from on high and delivered me out of deep waters.” Only God’s kindness and forgiveness could and would take a profane, slave-trading sailor and transform him into His child.

Though Newton continued sailing and slave-trading for a time, his life was transformed. At the age of thirty-nine, John Newton began forty-three years of preaching the Gospel of Jesus Christ. For his Sunday evening services, Newton often composed a hymn that led into the lessons and Scripture for the evening. His most famous hymn of all, we know today as Amazing Grace. *

There was no room for Jesus Christ in John Newton’s heart. Yet Jesus Christ rescued him at sea and gave him new life. That’s grace. Intense hatred toward Jesus Christ and Christians consumed Saul. But then Saul came face to face with the risen Lord Jesus Christ and afterward exclaimed to any who would listen to him, “He is indeed the Son of God!” Saul became Paul. That’s grace.

When the world says, “Go after the one who has it in for you and do likewise to her,” grace says, “Show kindness to her.” When girls on the opposing team taunt you and your teammates after beating you, grace says, “Congratulate them on their victory.” When you are insulted, grace says, “Forgive her.”

Question: What is grace? Grace is undeserved favor. The closest example of grace is the relationship between you and your mom or dad. You cannot make your parents not love you. You cannot do enough bad things to make your mom or dad to say, “After this, your 1,508th act of horrid behavior – I shall not love you any more.” You just can’t make them not love you. While they cannot bless you for doing something they know will hurt you; they don’t stop loving you. And God is a Father who feels the same way. God is not pleased when you mess up. But He doesn’t stop loving you. He went to great lengths to get your attention. He didn’t stop loving Saul. He went to great lengths to get his attention. That’s what grace is all about.

As intense as Saul's hatred was toward Jesus Christ, God's love was stronger. As intense as Saul's hatred was toward Jesus Christ, Paul was just as intense about his belief in amazing grace: the belief that we cannot save ourselves, but can only trust and accept the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ that God generously offers.

Read Romans 5:20 - 6:15

Grace is at the heart of Paul's teaching throughout the books in the Bible that he wrote. But when you teach something, you have to be able to defend it – be able to back up what you say, because people will challenge you, especially if they don't like what you're teaching. Paul's teaching of amazing grace ran into an argument. Some people listened to Paul's teaching on grace and said, "Why worry about sin anymore if God will just keep on forgiving us? (Romans 6:1). In other words, "Mom & Dad, let me keep breaking curfew so I can keep doing what I want to. You can forgive me every time, and all my friends will see how cool you are! I mean, it'll just give you more opportunities to show kindness and forgiveness!"

Question: What's wrong with the kind of thinking that says, "If we do wrong, we will receive more of God's kindness and forgiveness, so let's keep on doing wrong?" The whole point of what Jesus did for you and me was not to make us free to sin, but make us free not to sin. Without Jesus, we are slaves of sin. With Jesus, we are servants of right.

In the previous lesson, the question was asked, "Would you be mad if the worst person you can think of was pardoned – forgiven of his crime?" Paul obtained God's mercy (not getting what he deserved) so that he might become a monument: **"How thankful I am to Christ Jesus our Lord for considering me trustworthy and appointing me to serve him, ¹³ even though I used to scoff at the name of Christ. I hunted down his people, harming them in every way I could. But God had mercy on me because I did it in ignorance and unbelief. ¹⁴ Oh, how kind and gracious the Lord was! He filled me completely with faith and the love of Christ Jesus. This is a true saying, and everyone should believe it: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—and I was the worst of them all. ¹⁶ But that is why God had mercy on me, so that Christ Jesus could use me as a prime example of his great patience with even the worst sinners. Then others will realize that they, too, can believe in him and receive eternal life" (1 Timothy 1:12-16).**

Question: So how can you develop grace – this giving undeserved favor – in your life? The Bible says that Stephen was full of God's grace and power (Acts 6:8). Stephen did not get it by anything he did. You cannot get grace on your own. You cannot earn grace. You cannot learn grace. You can only receive grace. Grace comes from God. You can't give it 'til you get it.

John Newton received God's grace, but he didn't give it right away. In fact, for a time he went on with his ungodly lifestyle. But God wasn't through with him yet, and we'll get into that next lesson. We'll leave grace and move on to a couple of big words Paul likes to use: justification & sanctification. **

* Christian History Institute, Glimpses Article #28, www.gospelcom.net

** Adapted from Many Witnesses, One Lord Chapter 4. By William Barclay

PRACTICE SESSION 7: AMAZING GRACE

**"Amazing Grace, how sweet the sound
That saved a wretch like me
I once was lost but now am found
Was blind, but now, I see"** - John Newton, 1779.

1) Kids: Think of an occasion when you received a special gift "just because."

2) Dads: Reflect on John Newton's story. Now reflect on your own continuing story. What storms has Jesus pulled you out of or seen you through?

3) Kids: Have you recently been in a position to show grace to another?

4) Both: What's the difference between being "slaves to sin" & being "servants of right"? (Romans 6:6-7).

Read 1 Timothy 1:16

5) Both: What are some very cool things God does in this verse?

6) Both: Has God ever used you as an example for the benefit of others?

Good Words To Remember

"Do not let any part of your body become a tool of wickedness, to be used for sinning. Instead, give yourselves completely to God since you have been given new life. And use your whole body as a tool to do what is right for the glory of God" (Romans 6:13).

LESSON 8: COMPLETELY CHANGED, CHANGED COMPLETELY

“Yes, Adam’s one sin brought condemnation upon everyone, but Christ’s one act of righteousness makes all people right in God’s sight and gives them life” (Romans 5:18).

Read: Luke 15:11-32

Justification

“Therefore, since we have been made right in God’s sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us” (Romans 5:1).

In the previous lesson, we left John Newton having received God’s grace – God’s undeserved gift of salvation – but not getting life right yet.

Question: If John Newton became a Christian, why didn’t his life reflect God’s goodness right away? There are two big words that explain this: Justification & Sanctification. Together with grace, they form a triangle that takes us from completely changed to changed completely.

During a basketball game, Jenny found herself out of position which allowed her opponent’s team to score. During the ensuing time-out her coach asked sweetly, “Jenny, where were you supposed to be on that last play?” And Jenny starts back-pedaling, explaining why she did what she did, something like, “Well coach...you see... it was like this...” Jenny was out of position on the court, which left her out of position with her coach. So, Jenny did what anyone of us in that position does – try to make things right with the coach.

John Newton was out of position with God. You and I were out of position with God. But by and through God’s amazing grace we were brought back into the correct position. Two dynamics begin the instant you receive God’s grace. The first dynamic is justification – being made right with God. When we’re justified by God – it does not come about by some conversation with Him where He says, “Alright, why’d you do it?” - And you try to explain your actions, “Well...you see, God, it’s like this...” That’s not how it works. What does work is what God does for you: God puts you back in the proper position. Justification is “just-as-if-you-never-sinned.”

The perfect example of justification in action is the story of the Lost Son. The son planned to come back to ask to be a hired servant, but he never got the chance to make the request. He is welcomed as a son. The story of the Lost Son is the story of the Gospel: We’re out of position with God and what we deserve & expect from God is to be permanently benched, but instead, we are welcomed back onto the court with love. Our relationship with God is completely changed. We can come to God as a waiting Father. We can in repentance come to Him and at the same time have confidence and trust that we are forgiven and welcomed.

The second dynamic that occurs is sanctification.

Sanctification

“But now you are free from the power of sin and have become slaves of God. Now you do those things that lead to holiness and result in eternal life” (Romans 6:22).

Ever see those signs where there’s road construction that say, “Excuse our mess – work in progress?” That’s what sanctification is: “work-in-progress.” You’ve 1) received salvation through God’s grace 2) been justified - made right with God 3) now you’re being sanctified – becoming more like Jesus. God is transforming you into Jesus’ image from the inside out. It’s a process that will never be finished during your life here on this earth. Some days you may take two steps back instead of one forward. But one day, you will be made like Jesus – not equal to - but like Him in character & purity.

God’s goal for you in general is to become more like Jesus. Being sanctified is the process of being made holy. Since God is holy and since you’re becoming more like Him, He wants you to

be holy: **“But now you must be holy in everything you do, just as God—who chose you to be his children—is holy. ¹⁶ For he himself has said, “You must be holy because I am holy” (1 Peter 1:15-16).**

Here’s a good way to put all of Paul’s great teachings together without the big words:

The moment God saves you; you are freed from sin’s penalty. As you become more like Jesus; you are being freed more and more from sin’s power over you. And one day, when you meet Jesus face to face, you are freed from sin’s presence. This is God’s gift to you: freed from sin’s penalty; freed from sin’s power; freed from sin’s presence.

I want to go back to and tie a couple of verses together: **“But we know that there is only one God, the Father, who created everything, and we exist for him. And there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom God made everything and through whom we have been given life” (1 Corinthians 8:6).** You were brought into this world to exist for God’s purpose and to bring honor to Him. As a believer in Jesus Christ, your body is, as it ought to be, devoted to God, dedicated and set apart for him. It should be kept clean and pure for his service – both physically & mentally: **“Because we have these promises, dear friends, let us cleanse ourselves from everything that can defile our body or spirit. And let us work toward complete purity because we fear God” (2 Corinthians 7:1).** Being a Christian is more than just inviting Jesus into your life. It’s living a godly life and it’s hard. The good news is, though, with hard work comes great rewards. So, having worked our way through Paul major teachings we’re now ready to go on a most excellent journey with Paul – having a good time by having a good life.

Closing blessing & charge for tomorrow

“Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until that day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

²⁴ God, who calls you, is faithful; he will do this” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

PRACTICE SESSION 8: COMPLETELY CHANGED, CHANGED COMPLETELY

“But you are not like that, for you are a chosen people. You are a kingdom of priests, God’s holy nation, his very own possession. This is so you can show others the goodness of God, for he called you out of the darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9).

1) Both: What does it mean to be justified by God? (Romans 5:1).

Read: Luke 15:11-32.

2) Both: As you read through the story, which of the brothers lived the right way and deserved dads’ favor?

3) Both: How did the younger son approach his dad at the end of the story? (vs. 18-20).

4) Both: What was it that made the younger brother justified before his dad? (v. 20).

5) Both: What does it mean to be sanctified? (Romans 6:22).

6) Both: Who is responsible for making you holy? (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

7) Both: Do you have any responsibility in this process? (2 Corinthians 7:1).

8) Both: How can you keep yourself pure?

9) Both: Suppose you’re talking with a friend who is not a Christian, but has expressed interest? What would you tell your friend is hard about being a Christian?

10) Both: What’s the difference between a Christian that volunteers to serve Thanksgiving dinner at the Salvation Army Shelter, than a non-Christian who volunteers to serve Thanksgiving dinner at the Salvation Army Shelter?

Good Words To Remember

“Now may the God of peace make you holy in every way, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless until that day when our Lord Jesus Christ comes again.

²⁴ God, who calls you, is faithful; he will do this” (1 Thessalonians 5:23-24).

LESSON 9: HAVING A GOOD TIME BY HAVING A GOOD LIFE

“My message came by a direct revelation from Jesus Christ himself. No one else taught me” (Galatians 1:12).

I was asked one time, “How do you have a good time in life?” I answered, “By having a good life.” Naturally the next question was, “And how do you get a good life?” So we talked about what “good” means. Good can be: acceptable, right, unspoiled, accomplished, useful. All those definitions sound like what we want our lives to be. But it doesn’t matter what you or I think I right here. What matters is God’s definition of good.

A good life according to God is one filled with God’s goodness, **“for only God alone is truly good” (Mark 10:18)**. You can’t get God’s goodness on your own. You get God’s goodness from Him. It’s a gift: **“Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows” (James 1:17)**. God’s gift of goodness came to a man named Abraham about 4,000 years ago who was living in what we know today as Iraq.

Here’s what God said: to him **“Leave your country, your relatives, and your father’s house, and go to the land that I will show you. ² I will cause you to become the father of a great nation. I will bless you and make you famous, and I will make you a blessing to others. ³ I will bless those who bless you and curse those who curse you. All the families of the earth will be blessed through you” (Genesis 12:1-2)**. Abraham, of course, became the father of the Jewish nation. The Jews believed rightly that they were in a special relationship with God. That relationship is called a covenant. A covenant is more than a contract or agreement. It’s a relationship in which the whole initiative lies with God. God on his own initiative came to Israel with a special offer: that they would be his people and he would be their God. But with the covenant came responsibilities: Israel must accept and obey the Law which He gave them.

When you hear about the Law, it can have three meanings: First, it can mean the Ten Commandments; Second, it can mean the first five books of the Old Testament which contain both the moral and the ceremonial law (sometimes called the Torah, or Pentateuch, or the Mosaic Law – the law according to Moses). Third, it can mean the Oral Law. In the beginning the Law consisted of a series of great principles, such as, “Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy.” But what happened is that over time the Scribes (writers) and Rabbis (religious teachers) took these principles and worked them out in the greatest possible detail. For instance, according to ceremonial law the hands must be washed at certain times. So the Scribes spent hours defining just how much water must be used, just what the correct actions were. The Oral or Scribal Law took the great principles of the Law and made them into endless rules and regulations.

It was against these endless details of the Scribal Law that Paul constantly taught against. Here’s why: If a relationship with God depends on endless rules and regulations rather than principles, “earning points” enters in. Remember Jenny from our last lesson? If Jenny does all the right things on the basketball court, she “earns points” with her coach. If she continually messes up, she racks up more negative than positive points, and falls out of favor with her coach.

If a relationship with God is all about rules and regulations, Jenny can go two different directions. Jenny can become very impressed with herself. The more rules and regulations there are, the more opportunities for Jenny to score “points” with God. Jenny can continue to congratulate herself on her dazzling performance of doing everything the Law requires, and get to the point where she thinks she can get God to think He couldn’t get along without her.

The second result is the direct opposite of this: Jenny can become increasingly frustrated knowing she can never do things well enough to please God and convince Him to keep her in His favor.

It was the second situation that Paul found himself in. No person had ever worked harder and succeeded better in keeping the Law than Paul. But the harder he tried to follow all the rules and regulations, the further he felt from God. **"For no one can ever be made right in God's sight by doing what his law commands. For the more we know God's law, the clearer it becomes that we aren't obeying it"** (Romans 3:20). Paul knew, because Paul had tried it.

Question: So what was God's purpose for introducing the Law? If it had not been for the Law, Paul would not have known what sin was. The Bible says, **"...The law is not sinful, but it was the law that showed me my sin. I would never have known that coveting is wrong if the law had not said, "Do not covet" (Romans 7:7).**

Let's say that when you first get a cell phone, you were allowed to talk on it whenever you wanted. Then, when you stayed up to all hours of the night talking, your parents posted a new rule, "Thou shalt not talk on your cell phone on weeknights after 10:00 p.m. CST." Immediately, a new sin "talking on the cell phone weeknights after 10:00 p.m." is created. But there is another sense in which the Law creates sin.

Question: Take the cell phone rule for example. What happens when you were told you couldn't talk after 10:00 p.m.? You want to talk after 10:00 p.m. You want to do what you're not supposed to do.

Paul wrote: **"It seems to be a fact of life that when I want to do what is right, I inevitably do what is wrong. ²² I love God's law with all my heart. ²³ But there is another law at work within me that is at war with my mind. This law wins the fight and makes me a slave to the sin that is still within me. ²⁴ Oh, what a miserable person I am! Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin? ²⁵ Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord"** (Romans 7:21-24).

You can now see why Paul wasn't having a good time. He was in a hopeless situation – trying to please God by following a bunch of rules, made up by men trying to know what God wanted, when God has told us all along, in a way that a child can understand: **"...the Jews, who tried so hard to get right with God by keeping the law, never succeeded. ³² Why not? Because they were trying to get right with God by keeping the law and being good instead of by depending on faith."** (Romans 9:31-32). Faith in Jesus Christ makes us right with God, not faith in a bunch of rules. Jesus met all the requirements of the Law to make us right with Him. Faith in Jesus Christ replaces faith in the Law.

So if you want a good life, then venture out in an adventure called faith. A good life is a life full of faith: **"It is the confident assurance that what we hope for is going to happen. It is the evidence of things we cannot yet see"** (Hebrews 11:1). A good life is venturing out in the name of Jesus Christ. A good life is lived not by seeing, but by believing.

Adapted from Many Witnesses, One Lord Chapter 4. By William Barclay

PRACTICE SESSION 9 HAVING A GOOD TIME BY HAVING A GOOD LIFE

“It was by faith that Abraham obeyed when God called him to leave home and go to another land that God would give him as his inheritance. He went without knowing where he was going” (Hebrews 11:8).

Read: Hebrews Chapter 11

Jim Elliot was a hard worker, good student, and a star athlete. Most of all, Jim Elliot was committed to God’s plans for him. He continually sought God’s plan, waited for it to come about, and - most importantly - obeyed when God made His plan known.

Many of his friends told Elliott he should use his talents & abilities doing church work in America. Elliot, however, only wanted God’s plan - not others, not even his own. After several years of praying and listening for God’s answer, he sensed God was telling him to go to South America. “Why should some hear twice,” he said, “when others have not heard [the gospel] once?”

Elliot’s work lay ahead with a tribe of South American Indians called the Aucas. In January of 1956, Elliot and four companions landed on a beach in Ecuador. Within days of their first personal contact with the Aucas, Elliot and the other four men were killed by warriors from that tribe.

1) Why did Jim Elliot do what he did? (Read Hebrews 11:24-27).

Elliot’s death at the age of 28 was called a “waste of life” by some. But subsequent books on his life and death by his wife, Elisabeth Elliot, have been the catalyst for sending thousands into the mission fields. One person in particular went and lived among the same Auca Indians that killed Jim Elliot, learned their language and translated the Bible for them. Many of those Aucas eventually came to accept Christ as Savior. Her name is Elisabeth Elliott.

God had plans for Jim Elliot. God had plans for Elisabeth Elliot. God had plans for the Auca Indians. The only elements of their worlds that connected them was faith.

2) How do you hear about people’s needs in your family, school, community and world beyond?

Jim Elliot wrote, “He makes His ministers a flame of fire...Am I ignitable?” If you want to find out what a good life is, then begin an adventure of faith. This week, ask God to ignite an interest in the world around you. Write down needs you hear about, find ways you can help, then act upon what God is asking you to act upon.

Good Word To Remember

“For I know the plans I have for you,” says the LORD. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope” (Jeremiah 29:11).

LESSON 10: PAUL'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURES

“For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—Jews first and also Gentiles” (Romans 1:16).

Read Acts 9:1-31

He once crossed the continent of Africa, 4390 miles, from east to west, mostly on foot. All together he had traveled 29,000 miles in Africa. He discovered several lakes and rivers including Victoria Falls. His letters and reports had made him a national hero in England and his native Scotland. He left England in 1865, planning to return in two years. Six years later, David Livingstone was still missing somewhere in Africa.

In 1871, after leading a search & rescue expedition for more than 200 days covering 750 miles, Henry Stanley, a reporter for the New York Herald stepped up to an old man, removed his helmet and spoke the most dignified words that came to mind: "Dr. Livingstone, I presume?"

While Livingstone's explorations made him a national hero, excerpts from his journal show what his explorations cost him: frequent sicknesses, long, weary marches, supplies stolen or lost, the deaths of his wife and more than one of his children. But his great purpose in all his exploring was to open the way for the Gospel in Africa: "For a long time I have felt much depressed after preaching the unsearchable riches of Christ to apparently insensible hearts; but ...I know the Gospel is the power of God – the great means which He employs for the regeneration of our ruined world."

At the end of the previous lesson, it was said that a good life is venturing out in the name of Jesus Christ. If this definition is correct, then David Livingstone had a pretty good life, despite all the hardships he endured. David Livingstone was willing to serve Jesus on Jesus' terms, not his own, and the Lord had ignited a passion for Him within Livingstone, strengthening him to endure the hardships while achieving mighty works for God. Today, we'll go on an excellent adventure with the apostle Paul, of whom God said: **"...This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kings and before the people of Israel. ¹⁶ I will show him how much he must suffer for my name" (Acts 9:15-16).**

It didn't take Paul long to find adventure after he met Jesus. Jewish leaders plotted to murder him (Acts 9:20-31). Along the way on his most excellent adventures, Paul was beaten, stoned, shipwrecked, and once spent a whole night and day adrift at sea. Often times he went without enough food, water or clothing (2 Corinthians 11:23-27). Yet Paul was filled with a passion for the One who rescued him so he could help rescue others.

As Saul, he carried marching orders. As Paul, he had ordered marching. One day, God told some worshipers in the church in Antioch (today it's in Turkey) to dedicate Paul and a man named Barnabas for special work He had for them (Acts 13:1-3).

Paul's special work for God was like what the U.S. Marines call a "search & rescue mission." The Marines have a motto: "No man left behind." When a fellow Marine has been wounded or even been killed on the battlefield, his company will not leave him there. They will go to great lengths to rescue their man. This is what God was doing with Paul. God goes to great lengths to seek and save the lost. A good example of the lengths God will go to is found in the story of young Reilly Walker:

In June of 2003, 14 year-old Reilly was hiking with his Boy Scout troop in Fort Stanton Cave near Ruidoso, New Mexico. The Scouts had obtained the proper permits to explore the cave and Reilly was wearing proper clothing for caving, including a hard hat, knee-pads and gloves. While exploring Reilly fell about 15 feet off a ledge and severely hurt his leg. A fellow Scout stayed with him while others went for help.

LESSONS & LETTERS

Rescuers -- about 40 at one point -- wound their way down the narrow cave to reach Reilly later that day. Some came out and others arrived to relieve those who were tired because it was arduous, painstaking work. Rescuers had to crawl or stoop low through a 1,500-foot section of cave and crawl an additional 500 yards through another section as they pulled ropes attached to a gurney to bring Reilly out. A telephone line was strung in there to keep in touch with the rescue team. After 16 hours, Reilly was brought out of the cave, tired, but safe.

Reilly had done everything right. He had the proper equipment, wore the proper clothing, and even observed the buddy system. But he still fell, powerless to get himself out of the cave. Others went to great length to rescue him out of the pit into which he had fallen and bring him to safety. Without rescue, Reilly would have perished.

On one of Paul's "seek and rescue missions" - referred to as his "missionary journeys" he was directed in a vision to go to an area called Macedonia (today it's Northern Greece) where a woman named Lydia lived. Luke (who wrote a well known book called, Luke) joined him and as they were traveling from town to town visiting churches they came to the town of Philippi: **"On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. ¹⁴ One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message" (Acts 16:13-14).**

Lydia worshiped God. She prayed to God. She led a good and moral life. But Lydia had never met Jesus. She was as helpless as Reilly Walker - a prisoner in sin's cave, powerless to get out on her own. But Jesus did not want to leave Lydia in the cave -- so He sent Paul to go get her!

The effort to rescue Reilly Walker was pretty amazing, but look at the extraordinary lengths Jesus goes to for Lydia: Paul and his companions were trying to go to Asia to preach but Jesus wouldn't let them (Acts 16:6). They then tried another destination, but Jesus wouldn't let them go there either (Acts 16:7). Then Jesus gave to Paul a vision of a man imploring (pleading with) him to come to Macedonia (where Philippi was located). So Paul and his travelin' buddies re-routed their trip and went there (Acts 16: 9). Then, Jesus led them to a place outside of the city gates of Philippi to a group of women who gathered to pray, one of which was Lydia (Acts 16:13-14). As Lydia listened to Paul's message, God opened her heart to respond to Paul's message and she became the first Christian in Europe and her home became the first church! Jesus did the same for you. Jesus sent someone or "someones" to go and rescue you.

So, what about your most excellent adventure? Africa needed David Livingstone. Reilly Walker needed everyone who helped rescue him. Who is it that needs you? You can begin to find out in the Practice Session that follows this lesson.

PRACTICE SESSION 10: PAUL'S EXCELLENT ADVENTURES

“For I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes—Jews first and also Gentiles” (Romans 1:16).

So, what about your most excellent adventure? Where does God want you to go for Him? Who has God set up you up with a divine appointment? Last week you were asked to write down needs you hear about, find ways you can help, then act upon what God is asking you to act upon.

1) Before God gives you an assignment, He equips you for what He wants you to do. The first resource He gives you is found in 1 Chronicles 15:22:

The second resource is found in Matthew 25:21:

God will not give you something to do you cannot do. But what qualities, skills, abilities, and gifts He has given to you, He expects you to use for the reasons He gave them to you.

2) Both: What are you good at doing?

3) Both What interests do you have?

4) Both: Try to match what you're interested in with what you're good at doing, i.e.: "I'm interested in teaching and I'm good in art":

5) Both: What's one way you can possibly serve God in this way?

Rather than asking God to bless what you're doing (He might) ask Him to make you a part of what He is blessing (He will). Ask your family to support you as you step out in faith. God is able to accomplish through you infinitely more than you would ever dare to ask or hope

6) Both: There's no timetable on this one. Africa needed David Livingstone. Reilly Walker needed everyone who helped rescue him. Who is it that needs you? This week, pray for each other, asking God to make you a part of the adventure He is blessing, using the gifts, talents, abilities and skills He's given to you for His purposes. Write down any thoughts you may receive.

Good Words To Remember

“By his mighty power at work within us, he is able to accomplish infinitely more than we would ever dare to ask or hope” (Ephesians 3:20).

LETTER 1: THE STORY

October, 60 AD

DEAR PAUL – Thank you for your last letter. I hope you're being treated OK. Some of my friends are calling your letters "jail mail" - I hope you don't mind ☺. Will you tell me the story again? Tell my dad to come home soon – I miss him. Well, gotta go. Mom says I have to hurry and finish writing or else this letter won't get on the next boat to Rome! Your Pen Pal - Diana

DEAREST DIANA – Grace and peace to you from the Lord Jesus Christ. I am enjoying your father Alexander's visit while I am "vacationing" here in Rome. I really don't mind being in prison though, because even though I'm in chains, for two years I've been free to proclaim the Kingdom of God to all who have visited me (Acts 28:30-31). By the way, thank you for the flatbread you sent with him for me. I don't have many luxuries here, so this bread is a real treat!

Another treat your father brought with him is the good news that the church in Ephesus is growing and that people throughout the province of Asia – both Jews and Greeks – are hearing the Lord's message (Acts 19:10). And while your dad has been here I've been able to help him grow in his knowledge of God so he can understand the rich and glorious inheritance God has given to him. And I am praying for you, Diana, that you will begin to understand the incredible greatness of His power in your own life because you have believed in Him (Ephesians 1:18-19).

So...you want to hear the story again? Good! It's one that I don't get tired of telling: I met your father while I was working and preaching in Ephesus three years ago. He was working for Demetrius, a silversmith who had a large business manufacturing silver statues of the goddess Diana (Acts 19:24) for whom you are named.

Your father's craftsmanship was well-known throughout the province. Each year thousands of people from around the world come to Ephesus to visit the Temple of Diana and study magic. Many took home your father's work, earning him and Demetrius a good living. While the temple is impressive, Diana, remember, it is made by human hands. It does not compare to what awaits us in heaven – an eternal body made for us by God himself (2 Corinthians 5:1).

One day your dad became ill with a high fever. Though it resulted in temporary discomfort for him, this fever was God's plan to deliver him from the penalty and power of sin. The best doctors in Ephesus couldn't help him. Many who practiced magic came to your home but couldn't bring him any relief. Now at the time of his illness, the whole city was, as you might say, "freaked-out" because Jesus had given me power to do unusual miracles. If a piece of cloth touched me and was placed on a sick person, he was healed! (Acts 19:11-12).

Well, because of what Jesus was doing, everyone was talking about Him (Acts 19:17). You must have heard those stories Diana because as I was on my way to teach at the lecture hall, I passed by your home - you saw me, ran out and put a cloth in my hands saying, "Just touch this cloth and my father will be made well." The moment you took the cloth and placed it on his forehead, the fever left him! Even though you were a little girl, God gave you a big faith! Your father got up immediately and walked with me to the lecture hall and after I was finished speaking, he invited me to your home to have dinner.

"Uncle" Aquila & "Aunt" Priscilla who worked with me as tentmakers in Corinth (Acts 18:18) and came to Ephesus with me to help begin the church came with me to your home that night. They told you the message of our Lord Jesus' grace and forgiveness of sins. At the end of the message your father asked, "What must I do to be saved?" They replied, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and you will be saved, along with your entire household" (Acts 16:31-32). That same hour you were baptized, along with your father and mother. We made such a noise celebrating that your neighbors came over to see what was going on. And you started telling them the message!!

LESSONS & LETTERS

The news about your dad spread through the city like wildfire and hundreds came to see him, including those who tried to heal him with their magic. Filled with God's Spirit, your father told them the message and many became believers, confessing their sinful practices. Some who had been practicing magic even brought their incantation books - all together worth several million dollars - and burned them at a public bonfire. And so Diana, because of men like your father, the message about the Lord is spreading widely and having a powerful effect (Acts 19:18-20).

I know it's been difficult for your family financially since he left his business at the temple when he renounced allegiance to the goddess Diana, but the Lord is faithful and has provided for you. Your dad has been helping me in my tent-making and just yesterday got a letter from "Uncle Aquila" saying that he wants your dad to go into business with him when he gets back. In fact, your dad has been teaching Julius, the guard in whose custody I am under (Acts 27:1) a thing or two as well. Pray for him, Diana, that he may become as I am, except for these chains (Acts 26:29).

Your dad is a great teacher Diana. Learn from him, for I have instructed him well. He in turn can instruct you in how to live a life worthy of your calling, for you have been called by God (Ephesians 4:1). Even though you're only 12 don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity (1 Timothy 4:12).

And now Diana, I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love" (Ephesians 3:17).

Your Pal - Paul

PRACTICE SESSION 1: THE STORY

“I pray that your hearts will be flooded with light so that you can understand the wonderful future he has promised to those he called. I want you to realize what a rich and glorious inheritance he has given to his people. ¹⁹ I pray that you will begin to understand the incredible greatness of his power for us who believe him” (Ephesians 1:18-19).

Paul speaks of the rich and glorious inheritance we have as Christians. When you received Jesus Christ into your life, you were freed from the penalty of sin. As you allow Jesus to make you more like Him, you are being more and more freed from the power of sin in your life. God’s transforming power is at work in your life.

Read: Romans 6:22

1) Relate Romans 6:22 to Diana’s dad, Alexander, in the story. How did Alexander change?

Read: 1 Timothy 4:12.

2) In the story, Paul considered Diana a leader, even though she is young. What leadership qualities do you feel you have? How can you exercise those qualities daily?

3) If God gave you 1 Timothy 4:12 daily as a homework assignment, what kinds of practical everyday actions would you turn in?

God brought the world to Ephesus so Ephesus could take God to the world. What ministry and mission opportunities are in your backyard where you live?

Pray Ephesians 3:17 over each other this week

Good Words To Remember

“Be an example to all believers...” (1 Timothy 4:12).

LETTER 2: THE BATTLE

December, 60 AD

DEAR PAUL – I liked the letter you wrote to my church - except that it's so long - but there's a bunch of things I don't understand. Not everybody in our church agrees with what's being taught and sometimes I get confused and don't know what the right thing to believe is. Hope you're not mad at me.☺ Well, gotta go do my homework. ☹ Don't do anything to get in trouble (ha-ha)!
Your Confused Pen Pal - Diana

DEAREST CONFUSED DIANA - Grace and peace be yours, sent to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord. I'm happy that you're asking questions. It lets me know that you want to know what's true and what's not true. And that is precisely why I wrote that letter: so you know what God says is true and not just what people say, and to correct some wrong ideas and teaching that has crept into your church.

The church, Diana, is not just a stone building where people go inside to pray and sing hymns – it's a living building: All of us who believe are carefully joined together and we become a living temple for our Lord (Ephesians 2:21). And the overall purpose of the church is to praise God and point people in His direction (Ephesians 2:7).

But, Diana, the church is engaged in a battle that has been waging in the heavenly realms since the dawn of creation (Revelation 12:7-9) and is continuing here on earth. God's adversary is our enemy. His name is Satan. Just as Satan deceived Adam & Eve into turning away from God, he is working and would love to turn you away from God, luring you into his own way of thinking and engaging in his kind of activities. He will stop at nothing and will wait patiently for an opportune time to make it happen (Luke 4:13).

He tries to get you to doubt God's truths and believe his lies by wrapping them in things he knows are attractive to you (2 Corinthians 11:13): finding fault with others so you feel better about yourself; that things give you importance; obsessing with your outward appearance so much that you pay no attention to the "whatevers" – whatever is true, honorable and right; about things that are pure, lovely and admirable; about things that are excellent and worthy of praise (Philippians 4:8); activities that risk your physical and spiritual health are required to have a good time.

So Diana, you're right in the middle of the battle. You signed up for service when you invited Christ into your life. Satan hated that happened, so since he can't have your soul (John 10:28) he will try to divide your family, or ruin friendships and relationships, and make you ineffective as a Christian. And he will succeed if you're not alert and ready.

Your uncle Tychicus is in the military service. Would he ever go into battle without his armor? Of course not. Neither should you be without God's special protection - spiritual armor - so that you can stand up to Satan's attacks upon you. Surround yourself with those who know the truth. Guard what you allow yourself to hear and see. If you have an uneasy feeling about what you're hearing or doing, it's a good sign that your feet may be headed down the wrong path. It will be your unwavering faith and commitment to God's ways that will win the battle (Ephesians 6:13-16).

We are fighting an unseen enemy, but we can know where he is by the harvest he is producing: bitterness, rage, anger, cutting words, gossip, as well as all types of hurtful behavior (Ephesians 4:31). If you see these behaviors taking place within the church, you know the enemy has infiltrated. You can recognize Satan's lies because God has revealed to us who He is and what He is like through His Son Jesus (Hebrews 1:3). Where you see Jesus' light in the words and actions of others, despite Satan's attacks, that is where the church is winning the battle.

You may think its bad that Satan is around and stirring up trouble, but if he is not attacking, it means that you are doing nothing that concerns him, nothing that threatens to turn anyone away

from him and toward God. If your church is teaching God's word – you'll have a fight on your hands. So be alert Diana. Our Lord Jesus talked about how the church is fertile soil for deception (Matthew 13:25-26). Just as weeds grow within the wheat field, wrong teaching can creep within the church. So, how do Satan's lies get inside the church?

It happens when we're asleep. Some people are deceived into holding to their old ways of life - the things they did before they became Christians - because it's easier to live that way than the way Jesus has taught us. That type of living will attract and persuade some to stop following God's ways. And if no one is calling them back toward God's ways, they will continue to encourage each other to keep living the way they are.

Sometimes, Diana, a person will claim to be a teacher and will start teaching wrong ideas about God, and will deceive some into believing their wrong ideas. These ways of life give Jesus a black-eye. It diminishes Him. That's not fair to Him and it gives others who don't know Jesus the wrong idea about Him and how He wants Christians to live. Always check their teachings with the writings of the apostles and my own.

The church needs girls and boys to learn God's words and decide to live by them. If your generation chooses not to follow God's ways, the church doesn't have much of a chance of standing. And the church must stand for the sake of all people. The light of Jesus Christ that we as Christians carry is the last and only line of defense that can keep this world from being ruled completely by Satan. If we let the light grow dim, there is no other light to guide men back to God. Remember, it doesn't matter what you think the truth is, rather, what God says His truth is. So dear one, be constantly alert to what you're seeing and hearing (Ephesians 6:18).

And now Diana, "Fight the good fight for what we believe. Hold tightly to the eternal life that God has given you, which you have confessed so well before many witnesses. And I command you before God, who gives life to all, and before Christ Jesus, who gave a good testimony before Pontius Pilate, that you obey his commands with all purity. Then no one can find fault with you from now until our Lord Jesus Christ returns" (1 Timothy 6:12-14).

Your–Stay–Out–of–Trouble–Friend - Paul

PRACTICE SESSION 2: THE BATTLE

“Use every piece of God’s armor to resist the enemy in the time of evil, so that after the battle you will still be standing firm. ¹⁴ Stand your ground, putting on the sturdy belt of truth and the body armor of God’s righteousness. ¹⁵ For shoes, put on the peace that comes from the Good News, so that you will be fully prepared. ¹⁶ In every battle you will need faith as your shield to stop the fiery arrows aimed at you by Satan. ¹⁷ Put on salvation as your helmet, and take the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. ¹⁸ Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere” (Ephesians 6:13-18).

1) Dad: What are some of God’s truths Satan tries to get you to doubt?

2) Kids: What truths do you see Satan trying to get you to doubt?

Read Philippians 4:8-9.

2) Kids: What ways can you train yourself not to doubt God’s truths? How can you put these into practice?

Read Ephesians 6:13-18.

3) Dads: Where can you apply Eph 6:13-18 in your life?

4) Kids: Where can you apply Eph 6:13-18 in your life?

Good Words To Remember

“Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit. Stay alert and be persistent in your prayers for all Christians everywhere” (Ephesians 6:18).

LETTER 3: THE HEART

February, 61 AD

DEAR PAUL – Thanks for you last letter. I have another question. I don't get the whole Father, Son and Holy Spirit thing (Ephesians 1:12-13). You say there is one God, but if Jesus is God and the Holy Spirit is God, then aren't there 3 Gods? Can you help me out here? By the way - Dad's business is so good He and Uncle Aquila hired a new guy named Mr. Alexander. He used to work with dad at Mr. Demetrius' shop. He's not a Christian yet, but dad's working on him! Well...gotta go to choir practice ☺ Your Light-Bearing Pal – Diana.

DEAREST DIANA – How much I enjoy your letters – but couldn't you ask me some easier questions? Well, God did say He would show me how much I must suffer for Him...I just didn't know it would come at the hands of a 12 year-old girl's questions! I'll give this one a shot. Some people say that there is one God. But a better way to say it is, "God is one." This is what Moses wrote in the book of Deuteronomy, "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one" (Deuteronomy 6:4).

I know the church is dealing with these facts: God is one; Jesus is God; Jesus and the Father are not the same and then the Holy Spirit is also God and he is not the same as either the Father or the Son. The truth is that there are three persons and yet only one being, one substance.

The relationship between God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit has existed since the beginning, before time as we know and understand it existed. God the Father is the One who devised the plan of salvation. God the Son carried out the plan. And God the Holy Spirit "included you in Christ" when you believed and remains in you as a guarantee that God will give you everything He promised as your inheritance since he purchased you as his own (Ephesians 1:3-14).

When God the Father sent God the Son to us, God the Father existed separately after the Word became flesh. When you hear, "The Word was God," it means that, "What God was the Word was." Jesus had all of the qualities of God - He reflects God's own glory, and everything about Him represents God exactly (Hebrews 1:3). But not all of God was in Jesus. There is a constant discussion about the Son and the Father which makes them equal, but at the same time distinguishes them (see John 5:16–23). So, God the Father did not become Jesus.

One important fact to remember Diana is that you don't have to understand the truth to believe in the truth.

God is one, Jesus is God, and Jesus and the Father are separate beings. The Father can send the Son and the two of them can dialogue together. This is a mystery so my explanation is only a crude human attempt to understand something that is beyond understanding. God can simultaneously become a human being and then after the resurrection also indwell other human beings (by the Holy Spirit). He is a God great enough to rule the universe, caring enough to live a fully human life and intimate enough to live in each believer.¹

Another wonderful mystery is that God chooses to make His home within you – He wants to be more and more at home in your heart.² Every thought, every word, every action originates out of your heart (Matthew 12:34). Your heart is like a home Diana. It has many rooms and your heart is where the King of the Universe has decided to stay.

When you invite Cleo over to your home you don't want it to be a pig-pit. You put away the dirty laundry, perhaps dust a bit. Since your heart is Christ's home, Jesus wants to feel like he can come into any of your rooms and be comfortable. In order for that to happen, you need to put things in order. Let's talk about some of the rooms in your heart.

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Your mind is like the study or the library. It's the control room of your home. What have you placed on the shelves in your mind? What would Jesus see in your mind? If there are books or music that you wouldn't want Jesus to see or hear, get rid of them! Take all the things which are not helpful, pure, good and true, and throw them out! Fill the library with Scripture and meditate on it day and night (Psalm 1:2). When your thoughts are centered upon Christ Himself, His purity and power cause impure thoughts to back away and helps bring your thoughts under His control (2 Corinthians 10:5).

The living room – it's where you develop your relationships with family and friends. When you invite Kristina over do you just let her sit there by herself? Of course not. You hang out and talk. You invited Him into your heart. He's come as your Savior and Friend Diana, don't neglect Him. Jesus redeemed you at a great cost (1 Peter 1:18-19) so He could spend time with you. Even if spending time with Jesus doesn't mean a lot to you, do it for Him.

How about your work room Diana? Are you doing anything of lasting value, anything that will endure for many years? Jesus is great at building really good things that last. The more you let Him control you hands and your heart the more He will be able to do with your life.

Lastly Diana, is your rec room. If you invited your friend Alexandra to go to the town square with you, would you deliberately put her in an awkward situation, doing things and going places you know she wouldn't enjoy? Of course not – she'd feel rotten and so would you! So would you take Jesus places you know He would not enjoy? Do you ever let Him decide on something to do together, or are you always calling the shots? Jesus wants to go with you wherever you go. This is what you were made for – why Jesus went through all He did for you - to be with you. You've opened your world to Him, not let Him open His world to you. There will be new excitement and new joys waiting for you.

Precious Diana, you're like a daughter to me. I pray that from his glorious, unlimited resources he will give you mighty inner strength through his Holy Spirit. ¹⁷ And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love" (Ephesians 3:16-17).

Your-Gladly-Suffering-Friend - Paul

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PRACTICE SESSION 3: THE HEART

“And I pray that Christ will be more and more at home in your hearts as you trust in him. May your roots go down deep into the soil of God’s marvelous love” (Ephesians 3:17).

In Robert B. Munger’s booklet, My Heart – Christ’s Home, he compares your heart to rooms in a home. Simply put, your heart is the very center of who you are – it’s what makes you, you. The Apostle Paul says that Jesus wants to be more and more at home in your heart.

Read Philippians 4:8; 2 Corinthians 10:5.

The Library

1) Kids: Take inventory of what’s going into your mind. Challenge: If there are things you read, see or hear that you would be embarrassed to have Jesus read, see or hear, get rid of them and replace them with something that corresponds to Philippians 4:8. Write down what you’re getting rid of and what you’re replacing it with.

2) Dads: Ditto

Read 1 Peter 1:18-19

The Living Room

3) Kids: Do you have a time when you talk and listen to Jesus each day? Challenge: Find at least 5 minutes to spend with Jesus each day. Write down when that will be.

4) Dads: Ditto

Read Luke 5:3

The Rec Room

5) Kids: Would you deliberately put a friend or guest in an awkward situation? Jesus is your friend and your guest and has no choice but to go where you go. Are there are activities you enjoy that Jesus would be uncomfortable with? Challenge: Replace that activity with one that you know Jesus will enjoy too. Write it down.

6) Dads: Ditto

Good Words To Remember

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it affects everything you do” (Proverbs 4:23).

LETTER 4: THE GIFT

March, 61 AD

DEAR PAUL – Thanks for not getting tired of writing me back every time I have a question. You write such good letters – maybe one day they’ll all be put into a book for lots of people to read! There’s something I don’t get - are you surprised? ☺ You said I was chosen and all things happen just as God decided a long time ago” (Ephesians 1:11). Some in my church are saying that because we’re chosen, we’re better than others. I don’t think that’s a very nice way to speak about ourselves or others, but I don’t know what to think. Time’s up for today – gotta go clean up the pig-pit! ☺ Your chosen friend – Diana.

DEAREST DIANA – The prophet Isaiah wrote: “The rain and snow come down from the heavens and stay on the ground to water the earth. They cause the grain to grow, producing seed for the farmer and bread for the hungry. It is the same with my word. I send it out, and it always produces fruit. It will accomplish all I want it to, and it will prosper everywhere I send it (Isaiah 55:10-11). All I try to do is write down what God has revealed to me. If God chooses to use a bunch of letters written by the least of His people to help some receive His gift of Jesus Christ and become His children, then I’m a happy man. Now for your questions - they certainly keep me on my toes!

I think that you’re asking about what I wrote in the first chapter of my letter to your church in Ephesus: “Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure” (Ephesians 1:4-5). I can see where what I wrote would make you think God plays favorites. Let me try and clear this up for you.

Diana – God set out a plan from before the beginning of time and it has never changed. His unchanging plan has always been to take a divided, fragmented world and bring it together into one unified body which is the church (Ephesians 1:22-23).

About 3 years ago, I wrote a letter to the Christians in Rome. I hear some people are simply calling it “Romans” – kind of a catchy title don’t you think? In that letter I wrote: “God will work history for good for everyone who loves God” (Romans 8:28).

These “who love God” are those who are the “called.” You were not called and then dropped or forgotten about, but called for a purpose, which is fulfilling God’s plan in history. God has a future hope for Christians, and not only for Christians, but also for the whole of creation (Romans 8:18-25). God’s grand plan is to redeem human beings from sin, to spread the gospel throughout the earth bringing redemption to those who turn to Him.

Another way of putting this is that God entered into a relationship with you Diana, before some point in time in order to make you like His Son. This “coming-into-relationship-before-some-point-in-time” can mean two things: (1) God chose this relationship with you before you ever existed, for he has worked through the whole course of history to bring you to salvation and (2) God chose you as part of a group to have the gospel sent to.

So, Diana, we’re in the realm of three persons and yet only one being territory. We’ll never fully understand how God works through all creation and through the whole course of history to bring about His plans for one person or for one thousand people. So here’s my one-line answer: All those who love God are “the chosen” and God has a previously thought-out plan for them. And that plan is to make them like Jesus.¹ I’ll leave the “hows” and “whys” to God.

Now about your question about some saying that we’re better than others. That attitude comes from the Jews who view themselves as the elect of God and who view non-Jews – or Gentiles –

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that would be you – as those who could not possibly be chosen of God unless they became like Jews. Because of this attitude, some Jewish Christians argue that Gentile Christians need to become Jews and keep the law if they really want to be saved, while others feel that while salvation is not at stake, without keeping the law you can't fully please to God. That's a bunch of hooey! The Holy Spirit received through Jesus Christ is the only solution to human sin. While we do have to cooperate with Him, He is the One who makes us children of God. Christians, therefore, should be the most grateful of all men – and girls!

To Him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to His power that is at work within us, to Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! (Ephesians 3:20-21).

Your-On-His-Toes-Friend - Paul

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PRACTICE SESSION 4: THE GIFT

“Long ago, even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes. ⁵ His unchanging plan has always been to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. And this gave him great pleasure. ⁶ So we praise God for the wonderful kindness he has poured out on us because we belong to his dearly loved Son. ⁷ He is so rich in kindness that he purchased our freedom through the blood of his Son, and our sins are forgiven. ⁸ He has showered his kindness on us, along with all wisdom and understanding” (Ephesians 1:4-8).

Christians, more than anyone, should be grateful to God for adopting us into His family. Being adopted does not make us better than anyone because we don't deserve God's kindness. Rather, it should humble us and motivate us to live our lives as a thank you letter to God.

When you receive a gift, its good manners to write a thank-you note to whoever gave you the gift, and using the gift in a way that will honor the giver.

1) Kids: Today, if you have received the gift of His Son into your life, write Him a thank you note with your life. This is a personal conviction and future intent as it relates to being a Jr. High and High School student. If you are not ready to do this, it is far better to say that than to write it down, or dads, to write down for them what we wish they would say. Girls, this is a way to declare before your friends how you want to live in response to the grace God has given to you.

Using Scripture as a base, below is an example of what one statement of intent might look like.

“I believe that it is a trustworthy statement and worthy of full acceptance, that Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners, sinners just like me” (1 Tim 1:15). I purpose to live these next 5 years of school with you my friends as an encouragement to your walk with Christ and as an example to all our classmates and friends who do not yet know of God's love for them. I will let my light shine before all my classmates in such a way that they will see my good works and glorify my Father Who is in heaven” (Matt 5:16) I am committed to spurring you on to love and good deeds and being spurred on by you (Hebrews 10:24).

Girls, what will make it right is if it comes from your heart and you mean it. THERE IS NO RIGHT WAY TO DO THIS OTHER THAN BEING HONEST, AUTHENTIC TRUE, and SPECIFIC as possible.

2) Dads: Choose a scripture in your daughter's statement and pray it over her each day.

3) Girls: Write out the verse your dad gives you and place it where he will see it each day, i.e.: a copy for home, office, car, etc.

Good Words To Remember

“So we praise God for the wonderful kindness he has poured out on us because we belong to his dearly loved Son” (Ephesians 1:6).

LETTER 5: THE CALL

May, 61 AD

DEAR PAUL – Do you take smart pills or something? You know so much! I was at church yesterday and my dad was teaching. He was really good! Then I heard my friend Xerxes telling someone about how to become a Christian – he was awesome! I wish I could teach like my dad or tell others about Jesus like some of my friends. You all make it seem so easy, but doing these things isn't easy for me. I'm not sure what I'm good at doing ☹. What should I do? Well...gotta go. Dad's going down to Diana's temple to see who he can talk with about Jesus and he's taking me and some of my friends from youth group with him ☺. Your challenged friend – Diana.

DEAREST DIANA – Remember in my most recent letter to you I said that you were called by God? If your teacher in school calls on you to answer a question in class or your track coach picks you to run in the stadia race, they must believe that you are able to answer the question or run the race. When God calls you He expects an answer. The good news is He has given you the ability to answer the call. I know I've said this to you before, but it's worth repeating: in all of human history, there is no one else nor will there be any one else who can do the work God has especially made you to do. You are a specific part of the body and without you the body doesn't work as well. The body needs you to be who God created you to be.

God has given each Christian a special gift. Some are apostles, prophets – meaning those who tell people what God is saying – evangelists who God uses to help bring people to faith in Jesus Christ through preaching the gospel, pastors and teachers. All these people have a responsibility to help you get ready to do the work God has given you to do. They don't have the abilities or the "calling" that you do, just as much as you don't have the abilities they have. What's easy for you is not easy for them! Diana, as each person does his or her own special work, everyone will benefit from everyone else. This is called "building-up" the church (Ephesians 4:7-16) and it's crucial the church is built up, for as I wrote to you earlier, if the church isn't built up, it doesn't have much of a chance of standing. And the church must stand for the sake of all people.

So, Diana, what do you specifically do for God? What's your part of the body? You have to find out. But there are some common sense ways to go about it. First, what are you interested in? God has given those interests as a way to serve Him. Secondly, what are you good at doing? God has given you those abilities to serve Him. So while you're off and about exploring your interests and abilities, there are things that every Christian should pay attention to.

Do not live as the ungodly – hopelessly confused because they are far away from God because they shut their minds to Him. They don't care anymore about right and wrong, and they have given themselves over to immoral ways. Their lives are filled with all kinds of impurity and greed (Ephesians 4:17-19). Because you are a new person in Jesus, put out for people to see what God is like - right and holy and true (Ephesians 4:24).

Live honestly, do not permit anger to control you. Let everything you say be good and helpful, so that your words will be an encouragement to those who hear them. Be kind, tenderhearted, and show forgiveness, just as God through Christ has forgiven you (Ephesians 4:25-31).

Follow God's example in everything you do by following the example of Christ. Let there be no sexual immorality, impurity, or greed among you. Such sins have no place among God's people. Obscene stories, foolish talk, and dirty jokes—these are not for you. Instead, let there be thankfulness to God. You are full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it! For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true. Try to find out what is pleasing to the Lord. Don't act thoughtlessly, but try to understand what the Lord wants you to do. Rather than filling your mind and bodies with things that will ruin your life, instead, let God's Spirit fill and control you (Ephesians 5:1-20).

LESSONS & LETTERS

Diana, I've enjoyed receiving your letters and writing to you. I hope to hear from you again soon. In the meantime, I have a new pen-pal. Her name is Alexis and she lives in the city of Colossae – not more than 100 miles from Ephesus. I wrote a letter to their church and can you believe – she has questions! I hope I have enough ink and paper to take care of you two!

And now, may grace and peace be yours, sent to you from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.

Your Loving Uncle - Paul

PRACTICE SESSION 5: THE CALL

“For though your hearts were once full of darkness, now you are full of light from the Lord, and your behavior should show it! ⁹ For this light within you produces only what is good and right and true” (Ephesians 5:8-9).

Read Ephesians Chapters 4 & 5

Using Scripture found in Ephesians 4 & 5, write out a prayer to help you live as “Children of Light.”

Dads:

Kids:

Dads & Kids: Swap prayers with each other. Print a copy and put it where you’ll see it each day and remember to pray it for each other.

Good Words To Remember

“You must display a new nature because you are a new person, created in God’s likeness—righteous, holy, and true” (Ephesians 4:24).

LETTER 6: LIVING FOR HEAVEN

Spring 62 A.D.

DEAR MR. PAUL – My name is Alexis and my Uncle Epaphras said it would be o.k. to write to you. I know you're very busy teaching in Rome but I hope you can answer a question about something that you told us in the letter you sent to our church here in Colosse. You said that Jesus was the Firstborn over all creation, but then you said He created all things. How can He have created all things if He had to be born first?

Your Curious Colossian Pen-Pal – Alexis

DEAR ALEXIS – Uncle E! How is the Reverend? I've never seen anyone wrestle in prayer like him (Colossians 4:13). The Reverend E would begin praying for someone and never let him go until He was the Lord's!

When I asked him to come to Colosse and begin your church about 7 years ago (Colossians 1:7), I recall him telling me about a particularly inquisitive 6 year-old niece of his! Glad to hear you haven't changed in that way.

I would dearly love to come to Colosse and meet you, but for now I must remain in Rome. Wouldn't it be nice if someday, someone could come up with a way to send an image of you to me all the way from Colosse? Then I'd know just what you're like. Come to think of it, that's what God the Father did with Jesus. God sent us a living image of Himself. Jesus is the image of God just like a son is the image of his father. So if you've seen Jesus you've seen God (John 14:9).

Now about your question: Jesus was not created – He is the Creator. When I said He is the firstborn over all creation, I mean He has dominion or rule over all things. Your oldest brother Mark Anthony is the first-born in your family, so he is heir and lord of all that will be his. God the Father has made Jesus the heir of all things: "but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Hebrew 1:2).

There was never a time that Jesus did not exist. Jesus is the One through whom God the Father created everything in heaven and earth. He is the arm of the Lord, and the world was made by that arm. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see. He made all things out of nothing, from the highest angel in heaven to people upon the earth.

A king has no kingdom without God's permission. Every parent's child is on loan to them from God. Everything and everyone is His: We are created by him, and are created for him; being made by his power, we are made according to his pleasure and for his praise. He existed before everything else began, and it is by the word of his power that everything is held together (Colossians 1:16-17).

The reason I tell you all this is that Jesus alone is enough to live for. I know that Colosse is not the great city that it used to be. Everyone is struggling just to survive and that can be very discouraging. But Christians in Colosse, Alexis, are living proof that though you have nothing as far as people are concerned, you have everything in Jesus Christ and He alone is sufficient for you. I'm so thankful that the Colossian Christians are living for heaven rather than for earth.

There are some teachers among you though, that would teach you to live for earth. They want to add-on man-made rules for your salvation. They want to impress people and receive the praise of men. But Alexis, I want you to receive God's praise. If you want to impress people, you can settle for that and get what people will give you. Or you can live to please God and receive His rewards.

Don't make the mistake of drifting away from God's teaching. God cannot approve of anyone who has rejected Him or will not submit and surrender to Him. And what if an entire city or country drifts away from Him? Do you remember the drought that your country went through last year? Do you remember that in the middle of it God permitted it rain to remind you that we are resource-less without Him?

When we decide to be self-reliant and self-sufficient apart from God, we will experience the absence of His blessing and presence of His wrath.

Alexis, your Uncle E gets it! He stands in awe and respect of God. He has accepted God's purpose for his life and God has honored him. So, Alexis, fear God. Respect Him. Listen to Him and obey Him. When you give yourself to God, and live for Him and don't care what others say; when you surrender yourself at the beginning of each day, then you're living the way God intends for you to live.

Listen, Alexis. The same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. Jesus Christ is changing lives everywhere (Colossians 1:6). When people live for Jesus and for His glory, the world works right. So, Alexis, here's what I want you to do every morning before you get out of bed: Say, "God- I belong to you – guide me for Your glory." And He will, and He will honor you. That's living for heaven.

Tell Uncle E hello for me.

Your Friend – Paul

PRACTICE SESSION 6: LIVING FOR HEAVEN

“This same Good News that came to you is going out all over the world. It is changing lives everywhere, just as it changed yours...” (Colossians 1:6).

1) Both: Jesus said that anyone who had seen him has seen the Father (John 14:9, Colossians 1:15). How can people see God today?

_____ (2 Corinthians 3:18).

2) Both: According to 2 Corinthians 3:18, what makes it possible for people to see Jesus in you?

3) Do you keep an “Uncle E’s” prayer list - people you pray for? Start one now. Who will you commit to praying for every day? Put the list where you’ll see it and remember to pray.

Name/Need: _____

Name/Need: _____

Name/Need: _____

4) Both: What do you think it means to live for heaven?

5) Both: When do you feel like you’re living for heaven?

6) Both: When do you feel like you’re living for earth?

7) When you live for earth, what will it take you to move toward living for heaven in those times?

Good Words To Remember

“...we can be mirrors that brightly reflect the glory of the Lord. And as the Spirit of the Lord works within us, we become more and more like him and reflect his glory even more” (2 Corinthians 3:18).

LETTER 7: THE “IN CROWD”

Spring 58 A.D.

DEAR MR. PAUL – I asked Mr. Apollos, our worship leader at my church here in Corinth a question about something you said in your most recent letter to our church, and he suggested I write to you. In your letter you wrote: “...those who become Christians become new persons. They are not the same anymore, for the old life is gone. A new life has begun!” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

Here’s what I don’t get: I became a Christian a few months ago. But sometimes I do some of the bad things that I did before I became a Christian. Also, some of my friends who claim to be Christians aren’t living any differently than they were before. I want to be friends with them but I don’t want to do some of the things we used to do together. I’m afraid they won’t like me anymore. What should I do?

Your Confused in Corinth Friend - Priscilla

DEAR PRISCILLA - I’m so pleased to receive your letter. I’ll tell you something about Mr. Apollos. He’s come a long way since becoming a Christian. When he was a brand new Christian, Apollos had a lot of book learnin’ but didn’t have everything straight when it came to Jesus. What he did have was a strong desire to teach people the Word of God. So while he was in Ephesus, my good friends Priscilla & Aquila came along side of him and began to help him understand the Word more accurately and how to put it into practice in his life (Acts 18:24-26). And now he is doing the same with you.

Even though I’m confident Apollos could answer your question, his encouraging you to write to me should teach you something very important – if it’s worth knowing, it’s worth working hard to learn. And I can see that this is important to you, which means God is at work in you. That’s good news! So hang on Priscilla, here we go.

When you became a Christian, Jesus gave you His power to live a life pleasing to God the Father. But Jesus never forces us to choose His ways. He lets us choose whether we walk with Him or hide from Him. When we decide to hide, we’re not living any differently than those who aren’t Christians, or those who are Christians but are living like they aren’t. We’re quick to say, “Jesus is Lord” yet the priorities and values which we pay attention to make it appear that we have many “lords.” Priscilla, there’s a reason why we sometimes decide to hide.

In your “old life,” even though Jesus freed you from sin’s prison, sin’s influence upon you wasn’t automatically removed. It’s a battle you’ll fight the rest of your life. So, to be a “new creation” is not to be perfect or faultless, or immune from anger and pain, or shielded from the tough experiences of life. Rather, to be a “new creation” is to live life in the power Jesus gives you to overcome sin again and again.

So, if your friends are not living as Jesus commands, but you’re trying to, you want to know where you fit in. There’s no one who doesn’t want to be liked. You want to be liked for who you are. Generally, people hang out with like-minded people - the crowd. If you feel things between you and your friends are changing, that can be a pretty insecure feeling. But Priscilla, depending on where your crowd is coming from or going toward, they can either help you or hurt you.

The question you have to answer now is, “Who do you want to be accepted by and at what price?” When you live your life trying to please people you end up compromising. You either compromise your integrity – perhaps drawn into gossip that ends up hurting a friend’s feelings; or you compromise your morality – you’re “double-dog-dared” to try something you don’t want to do. So you compromise to please them.

But the thing with people pleasing is that it's always short term. What you did to please someone Friday night may not matter Monday morning. People change and what the crowd accepts changes, but God never changes (Numbers 23:19).

There are two things you need to understand and hang onto:

- 1) Jesus accepts you just the way you are (Ephesians 1:4-5).
- 2) Jesus wants you to stop compromising to please people and start living to please Him (Philippians 1:21).

When you live for Jesus, you never have to worry about compromising your integrity or morals. You won't have to keep track of who to please next. People will always know who you are because you'll be rock-solid – secure in God's love and who you are because your life is wrapped up in honoring Jesus.

When you decide to live your life for Jesus and not for others, you're free to be the person God created you to be. He'll even help you understand who you are and how to get where you want to go: Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will know what God wants you to do, and you will know how good and pleasing and perfect his will really is (Romans 12:2).

There's an "in crowd" waiting for you Priscilla - it's the people who will encourage you to live your life for the Lord. It's God's crowd.

PRACTICE SESSION 7: THE "IN CROWD"

"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a huge crowd of witnesses to the life of faith, let us strip off every weight that slows us down, especially the sin that so easily hinders our progress. And let us run with endurance the race that God has set before us. ² We do this by keeping our eyes on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from start to finish. He was willing to die a shameful death on the cross because of the joy he knew would be his afterward. Now he is seated in the place of highest honor beside God's throne in heaven. ³ Think about all he endured when sinful people did such terrible things to him, so that you don't become weary and give up" (Hebrews 12:1-3).

1) Dad: What crowds were around when you were growing up? Was there a time when you felt like you didn't fit into one that you wanted to be in? How did you handle it?

2) Lad or Lass: How would you describe your group of friends?

3) Lad or Lass: Have there been times when you've been asked by a group to do things that go against your values or integrity? How did you handle it?

4) Both: The Bible says: **"So accept each other just as Christ has accepted you; then God will be glorified" (Romans 15:5-7).** What does this verse tell you about yourself and what does it tell you about others?

5) Lad or Lass: Read Matthew 5:10. What does Jesus tell you might happen if you take a stand and live for Him? Is it worth it?

6) Lad or Lass: Read Hebrews 12:1-3 (above). What encouragement do these verses give you in living for Jesus?

Good Words To Remember

"For I live in eager expectation and hope that I will never do anything that causes me shame, but that I will always be bold for Christ, as I have been in the past, and that my life will always honor Christ, whether I live or I die" (Philippians 1:21)

LETTER 8: NOT YOUR AVERAGE JOE

Spring, 48 A.D.

DEAR MR. PAUL – I was thinking about some of the things you said in your letter to my church here in Lystra (in Galatia), and my Grandma Lois suggested I write to you. Sometimes I get discouraged because I can't teach or preach like some others in the church can. I'm not really a leader, so a lot of times I end up doing little, nothing jobs – like taking food to sick people, or babysitting in the nursery so their moms can go to scripture study – you know, stuff like that. How do I find out what God really wants me to do to serve Him?

Your Lost Lystrian Friend, Sandra

P.S.: I'm sorry that you get in trouble sometimes when you tell people about Jesus (Galatians 6:17). I'm going to pray for you everyday! ☺

P.P.S.: By the way, there's a cousin of mine named Timothy. He's always talking about being a missionary. I keep telling him that he'd be an awesome missionary. Maybe if you get back this way some day you could talk to him and give him some pointers.

DEAR SANDRA – Thank you for your very kind words to me. They're very encouraging. By the way, did you know that your name means "helper?" And I think I know just how to answer your question about how you can serve God. When I was in Lystra not too long ago, I watched the annual Lystra Marathon. I was sitting half-way up what they called "Heartbreak Hill," one of the most difficult stages of the 25 mile race. As I watched the runners going by, I noticed a young man struggling to make it up the hill. He was completely exhausted. I didn't think he could take another step. Just then, another man came alongside him, said some words to him, put his arm around him and step by step, they made their way up Heartbreak Hill together. Sandra, that man reminded me of a good friend of mine named Joseph.

Every time you turned around, Joseph was helping someone. He helped people so often the apostles nicknamed him "Barnabas" which means "Son of Encouragement."

Barnabas helped people in need. One time he sold his own property and gave the money to help the poor (Acts 4:36). He helped widows who had no one to care for them and men who couldn't find work after publicly acknowledging Jesus Christ as their Savior & Lord. He encouraged with words, and also by what he did for others. Barnabas practiced what he preached.

Barnabas helped me when no one else would. When I became a Christian, every one of my friends hated and rejected me. Christians were afraid and suspicious of me because of how I had treated them. Even the disciples weren't quite sure what to do with me. But there was Barnabas, explaining to them what God had done for me (Acts 9:27). And because of him, they accepted me.

Barnabas didn't play favorites. Some believers left Jerusalem because the persecution against Christians was so intense. These believers told some non-Jews in Antioch (in Syria) about the Lord, and many of them believed. The church in Jerusalem didn't like believers talking with Gentiles so they sent Barnabas to find out what was going on there. Well, Barnabas ended up staying there a whole year, encouraging them to follow Jesus with all their hearts. Did you know Sandra that the church in Antioch sent the first missionaries to Europe? I wonder how many became missionaries because of Barnabas' encouragement?

And I was privileged to be included in that work. The church in Antioch needed teachers so Barnabas traveled to my hometown of Tarsus, found me, and brought me back to Antioch. Without Barnabas, I might never have begun the missionary work to the Gentiles God has called me to do (Acts 11:19-25).

LESSONS & LETTERS

There's one other story I want to tell you about Barnabas. On our first missionary journey together, Barnabas brought along his young cousin John Mark – we just call him Mark. About half-way through the trip, Mark left and went home. When it came time to start the next missionary journey, Barnabas wanted to give Mark another chance. I'm embarrassed now to say that I was so angry at Mark that I wanted no part of him. The disagreement between me and Barnabas was so heated that we parted ways for a long time (Acts 15:36-39). Over time, I realized that I was wrong. Mark became very helpful to me in my ministry (2 Timothy 4:11).

Sandra, here's my answer to your question: I want you to keep coming alongside others and helping them (1 Thessalonians 5:11). God has given you the gift of encouragement. It's what you're good at doing and it's what you should continue to do.

Those little "nothing" jobs you do may not get you in the spotlight, but they enable others to do the work the Lord has given to them to do. Trust me; they can't do it without you, just like I could never have done what God wanted me to do without Barnabas.

Your Encouraged Friend – Paul

P.S.: By the way, I'll look Timothy up next time I'm in town. I could use the help!

PRACTICE SESSION 8: NOT YOUR AVERAGE JOE

“Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near” (Hebrews 10:24-25).

Here’s something pretty cool. Because Barnabas came alongside Paul, Paul was able to go out and preach to the Gentiles. Because Barnabas continued to encourage his young cousin John Mark, we received the gospel of Mark. Barnabas himself never wrote a book that found its way into the Bible, but he encouraged two men who wrote over half of the New Testament!

There are times we all need encouragement - A kind word at the right moment, a thank you letter. This week, I want you to consider being a Barnabas to someone.

1) Both: How can you come alongside & encourage someone you know who is in need, i.e.: sick, family problems, financial hardship this week?

2) Both: Think of those in your church who aren’t normally thought of, i.e.: organists, janitors, choir members, etc. Or those in other ministry work. What can you do to come alongside and encourage them this week?

3) Both: Sometimes, new Christians who “walk in the front door may quietly slip out the back door.” Do you know a new Christian? What can you do this week to encourage him or her?

4) Both: Do you know of a Christian who is living like he/she isn’t a Christian? What can you do this week to encourage him/her to return to following Jesus?

Good Words To Remember:

“When the church at Jerusalem heard what had happened, they sent Barnabas to Antioch. When he arrived and saw this proof of God’s favor, he was filled with joy, and he encouraged the believers to stay true to the Lord” (Acts 11:22-23).

LETTER 9: COMING ALONGSIDE

Fall, 67 A.D

HELLO OLD FRIEND – I recently came across the letter you wrote to me 20 years ago after I wrote to you asking how I find out what God wants me to do for Him. I'm glad I took your advice and began looking for ways to come alongside people around me. Over the years I've been able to see the fruit of those little "nothing jobs" God gave me and how it helped others do what God gave them to do. I've discovered that I'm not really an "up-front-spotlight" kind of a girl. I much prefer to work quietly in the background.

Here's my question d'jour: I recently met a young girl named Chloe (which means "blooming"). She really wants to follow Jesus. Any suggestions for me about how I can guide her?

P.S.: By the way, if you hear from Cousin Tim, tell him to stop preaching long enough to write me a letter. They take forever to get here, since he's taken to running about the world with you. Every time he writes he thanks me for encouraging him to meet you (Acts 16:2). I guess God can take a "little nothing" and make a "big something" out of it!

P.P.S.: I really have been praying for you every day these last 20 years! ☺

Your Biggest Cheerleader, Sandra

HELLO DEAR FRIEND (I will never call a woman "old!"). You're right. You have come a long way. And I will tell you again what I've told you many times. Your prayers have helped sustain me through many long nights in prison and helped protect me from many dangers. I consider you a partner in my work for the Lord. I could not do what I do without you, Sandra.

I remember meeting Timothy for the first time when he was a teen-ager. Everyone told me that he was too shy and not physically strong enough to be of use out in the mission field where it's hard and dangerous work. But I could see God's power at work in Him. He has his mother's and grandmother's faith in him. God did not give him a spirit of fear or timidity, but one of power (2 Timothy 1:7). More importantly, Timothy relies upon God for his strength. He doesn't try to do it on his own. It's Timothy's faith in God that makes him strong. With the strength God gives him, he continues to tell others the good news of Jesus Christ, whatever may come! (2 Timothy 1:8).

I'm so glad that God has led young Chloe to you. I think the most important thing you can do for her is to live your faith so she can catch it from you. Ask her to go along with you when you deliver a meal to your sick neighbor, or distribute food and clothes to the poor. Read the scriptures together and ask her how she can put God's words into practice. Help her see how to live like you believe it!

Teach her to cling tightly to your faith in Christ, and always keep your conscience clear. For some people have deliberately violated their consciences; as a result, their faith has been shipwrecked (1 Timothy 1:19).

Take time with Chloe to pray for all people (1 Timothy 2:1). Encourage her to be modest in her appearance. Her attractiveness doesn't come from what she wears or how she fixes herself up. Her attractiveness will come by the good things she does (1 Timothy 2:8-10).

I'm guessing that Chloe is about 12 or 13 which means she'll be interested in boys soon if she hasn't discovered them already. Here's the kind of guy she should look for and not settle for less: He should be respected and have integrity. He must be committed to Jesus Christ and live with a clear conscience (1 Timothy 3:8-10).

LESSONS & LETTERS

Despite Chloe being young, encourage her to set the example of how to live a godly life (1 Timothy 4:12).

In a wealthy home some utensils are made of gold and silver, and some are made of wood and clay. The expensive utensils are used for special occasions, and the cheap ones are for everyday use. If you keep yourself pure, you will be a utensil God can use for his purpose. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work (2 Timothy 2:20-21).

Finally, Sandra, teach her to keep a clear mind in every situation. She shouldn't be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Continue to encourage her to work at bringing others to Christ. Help her to recognize that everyday God is giving her "little nothing" or "big something" opportunities to build His Kingdom. This is the ministry Christ has given you, Sandra. I know you'll do it well (2 Timothy 4:5).

Your Biggest Fan - Paul

PRACTICE SESSION 9: COMING ALONGSIDE

“In a wealthy home some utensils are made of gold and silver, and some are made of wood and clay. The expensive utensils are used for special occasions, and the cheap ones are for everyday use. If you keep yourself pure, you will be a utensil God can use for his purpose. Your life will be clean, and you will be ready for the Master to use you for every good work” (2 Timothy 2:20-21).

1) Both: What are some “little nothing” jobs that you do to help others?

2) Both: Read 2 Timothy 1:8. Do you know anyone who has “suffered” by telling others about Jesus Christ?

3) Both: In reading through Paul’s letter to Sandra, what ways has Sandra encouraged Paul?

4) Both: What guidelines does Paul give Sandra in mentoring Chloe? _____ (1 Timothy 2:1).

_____ (1 Timothy 2:8-10).

5) Both: What does Paul tell Sandra about the kind of guys Chloe should look for?

_____ (1 Timothy 3:8-10).

6) Lad or Lass: How should a young man or lady live his or her life?

_____ (1 Timothy 4:12).

7) Lad or Lass: What mentoring opportunities do you have everyday?

Good Words To Remember:

“But you should keep a clear mind in every situation. Don’t be afraid of suffering for the Lord. Work at telling others the Good News, and fully carry out the ministry God has given you” (2 Timothy 4:5).

LETTER 10: FOR HIM & BY HIM

Spring 68 A.D.

DEAR MR. PAUL – My good friend Miss Sandra said I should write to you. I really want to be able to tell people about Jesus, but I have this problem. Every time I try to say something, my words don't come out right. So, I decided I'd just do whatever I can to help out others. At first, everyone was appreciative, but now I end up doing them by myself 'cause everyone expects me to do them. I sort of feel like a doormat. I told Miss Sandra that someone like you who people listen to wouldn't understand what I'm going through, but she kept bugging me to write to you anyway. So here's my letter. Got any good prayers that God will listen to and make me talk normal? I'd give anything if I could say something that someone will listen to.

Your Frustrated Doormat – Chloe.

DEAR CHLOE - I'm glad Miss Sandra "kept bugging you" to write. And actually I do understand what you're going through. I have a "problem" too. In fact, I asked God three different times to take it away from me. I figured I could do more & do a better job with more if I didn't have this problem. Here's what He told me, "My power works best when you get out of my way" (2 Corinthians 12:9). See, God is more concerned with who you are rather than what you do. You are a human being, not a human doing. God uses your "problem" to accomplish great things.

Did you know my problem gives God opportunities to show others His power? When I let God take me as I am & merely do what He gives me to do and allow Him to work out the results, that's when I'm strong (2 Corinthians 12:10). Here's what I've decided Chloe. Even if no one appreciates what I do for them, yet it's what God wants me to do, then I will gladly do it for Him and by Him (2 Corinthians 12:15).

Chloe, since Jesus gave up His life for me, I figure I should give up mine for Him. I can handle a few insults or inconveniences. In our world today the thought of living for Jesus above all else is rapidly fading. But Mary, our Lord's mother, thought differently. When she learned what God wanted her to do for Him, she said: "I am the Lord's servant, and I am willing to accept whatever he wants..." (Luke 1:38). Mary said, "For Him & by Him!" Mary understood that life is all about serving God on His terms and not ours. It's how you can be a "doormat" and not resent getting stepped on from time to time. Because it's God you are serving, what He thinks is much more important than what anyone else thinks, or says about you.

Chloe, there's another reason I'm glad you wrote to me. This will most likely be the last letter that I will write. God's work for me here on this earth is about to come to an end, and I need you to do something for me.

I met Jesus when I was 30 years old. That was 33 years ago. And for these past 33 years my life has been an offering to God. I've been like a pitcher filled with water, and the water is God's word that He pours out through me. But the pitcher is almost empty. I have fought a good fight, I have finished the race, and I have remained faithful. And now the prize awaits me - the crown of righteousness that the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give me on that great day of his return. And that prize is not just for me but there will be one for you, Chloe as well, if you will give up your life as an offering to God (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

So here's what I need you to do Chloe. Pass my words on to others. Don't worry about your speech problem. People will listen to you not because you're you, but because you're God's.

For Him & By Him – Paul

PRACTICE SESSION 10: FOR HIM & BY HIM

“Mary responded, “I am the Lord’s servant, and I am willing to accept whatever he wants” (Luke 1:38).

In our world today the thought of living for Jesus above all else is rapidly fading. But Mary said, “For Him & by Him!” Mary understood that life is all about serving God on His terms and not ours.

1) Both: Write down an area in your life where you are willing to say to God, “For You & by You.”

2) Both: Write down how you will trust the results in this area of your life for Him, and live it by His power.

Good Words To Remember

Since I know it is all for Christ’s good, I am quite content with my weaknesses and with insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong” (2 Corinthians 12:10).