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First American Book Rights
Nonfiction, Page I
October 4, 2013
Word Count: 30,000
Pages 50

Christianity For Today
Living a Christian Life in Today's World
A Life Changing Six Week Study Program

Robbie L. Rogers

Note: You may study this course by yourself or through a group effort. All material needed is in this book. You may copy the pages and hand them out to leaders or participants. If you wish there are other books for training, talks, and workbooks. The object is not to make money but to inform and teach what is contained within. My only request is that if you charge an attendance fee that you purchase the entire program as is fitting. My attempt is to provide the substance and make it available to those who can afford it and to those who cannot. If your church or group can afford it is best for all concerned if you purchase this **Complete Course Book** along with the **Group Leader's Book** according to how many leaders you will have and the **Participant's Book** for each participant you have. In buying the complete course along with 10 Group Leader and fifty Participant books you will receive a free stand alone PowerPoint Presentation Disk with Talking Points Slides to use as a DVD projection show while each session is being given or leaders are trained. Otherwise you may purchase it separately.

Introduction

Who needs *Christianity For Today*? What's wrong with what's already going on? Did you know many Americans have created a "what feels good" religion when it comes to Christianity? We feel our faith is between us and God and not to be influenced by others. Only 7 out of 100 people in the U.S. say Jesus significantly affected their life. Yet, 80% say they are Christians. However, of that eighty percent, 50% don't even know who gave the sermon on the mount. *What about our younger generation?* One third of American teenage Christians don't know what Easter is all about. Half of all Christians do not even have a basic understanding what Christianity really is. Seventy percent have unclear ideas as to God's saving grace and what of being saved really means. What this means is that most people including those who profess to be Christians do not see the relevancy of being part of a church or fellowshiping with more mature or knowledgeable Christians. ***In other words we need to become missionaries to our own homes and churches, evangelizing America. In doing so we must find that special way to reach our unchurched Christians, using our own enthusiasm as an avenue.***

A whole army of sideline people are waiting, if not willing, to be revitalized for Christianity. Unfortunately though, we Christians are too often afraid of the "E-word;" could it be that we don't evangelize because we know little about what we ought to know in order to share enough to make a difference to someone concerning Christianity? ***Christianity For Today*** is a great tool for that purpose. *Christians scored the lowest of those who say religion is the most important thing in their life; half of them seldom, if ever, read their Bible though they often own several copies.* We need to close the gap between beliefs and actions; though our leaders and the laity are often divided in such matters, this can be turned around by much prayer and ***Christianity For Today.***

Why will *this course* be successful while others have failed? I can't fully answer that. The ***Christianity For Today*** approach is essentially nothing new if you look at the outlines and program, yet we believe Holy Spirit will bless the efforts wherever they are done.

You can judge *Christianity For Today* by its fruit. Usually we chose to first offer the course primarily to those in your own church; it puts an emphases on servanthood and doing ones part in a team effort. While doing so it also targets those who are on the edge of a commitment or those who attend sporadically.

In *Christianity For Today* we teach responsibility to others. We expect participants to freely give and get involved. Instead of pushing the rope up the hill, ***Christianity For Today*** will teach everyone to join the team, pulling together on the rope. Each week a different group will have clean up and set up duty, leaders and participants alike, we do not ask... it is expected and everyone does what is expected. Isn't it funny. If little is expected... that's what we give. If much... we give much. ***Maybe we are on to something here.***

Christianity For Today will stress close “small fellowships”. For many participants within a small group setting it will be the first time someone really listened. They will be prayed for and receive prayer in a small close fellowship setting for the things they shared and heard shared by each other. Jesus empowered us to do so yet we have forgotten how. Most likely participants have never considered laying hands on one another praying, asking a God who was once distant or non-existent to them to heal or grant new life to themselves or others.

What is Christianity For Today worth? When nothing much is happening as far as sustained growth concerned in our churches, it will be worth quite a lot! Each **Christianity For Today** Group will produce people dedicated to a simple brand of evangelism, seeking to expand God’s Kingdom by inviting and including them, thereby splitting and spinning off many small group meetings in other neighborhoods nearby.

What is the end product of Christianity For Today? When you look at the increased possibilities the program brings to the future of the Church, things will rapidly happen for the good. Our vision heavily encompasses all churches, especially in the area of establishing lay ministry, utilizing Neighborhood and Home Fellowship groups.

People want to help; yet, they don’t want to sign away their life either, we stress getting priorities in order and family is the first order. ***If enough people work together visions come true.*** A church no matter what size cannot expect its pastors to meet all the needs of all the congregation; the laity can and should heavily augment them. Through a simple projection of numbers and the blessings of God through Holy Spirit your church can have at least one active Home Fellowship in each centralized Neighborhood Group, thereby ministering to and evangelizing many, truly drawing those you could not reach before into the Kingdom of God.

Our dream is 10 Fellowships at each church and to turn the 80/20 rule upside down. Instead of 20% of the people doing 80% of the work... *it will be 80% of the people doing 100% of the work.*

We have a vision of an even healthier Church and **Christianity For Today** will be the thread or vehicle that makes it happen. We believe God wants to see the body of Christ increasingly committed to Lay Ministry, drawing the unsaved into our midst, letting the completeness that God raised up minister to their needs, reaching new and unchurched people, those on the edge, moving them healthy into expanded Home Fellowship groups, drawing them into a deeper relationship with Christ through people and the church, spreading the Gospel and making disciples as Jesus told us to do.

To insure this we desire to use, as much as possible, "**mature in-the-Lord Christians**" as lay leaders, people chosen from the various existing ministries. This way a natural progression develops, pulling **Christianity For Today** people into Neighborhood Fellowship groups. This also gives the Neighborhood Groups a vehicle to evangelize around them in a non-threatening way. ***Anybody can hand out the Christianity For Today brochures.***

Each **Christianity For Today** course will be immersed in prayer and fasting. Our method for leading Small Groups is "**Don’t Teach, Guide. Listen. Let Holy Spirit Do His Work.**" *Every effort is made to keep Christianity For Today organized, yet simple and straight forward, feeling the participants need it.* We suggest meeting as a leadership group 15 minutes before the meetings begin (say, **6:15**) for prayer, praying for the people and the area set aside for those who attend. At **6:30** dinner promptly begins; **7:00** Talks (teaching); **7:30** Small Groups; **9:00** End.

Punctuality is highly suggested. This is not a problem if you establish it from the beginning. You can establish your own time schedule yet these times seem to work best. Note the dinner part, Jesus suggested often, meeting with a meal before hand.

This rings up one important problem or situation that needs to be addressed, *eating.* Each group should mutually decide how to approach it. You can have it catered simply or provided by your church in some manner, decide which approach you need. **However the material for the program is free...** *You should advertise it as free,* and Christianity For Today stresses this. However you might ask for donations for meals and baby sitting expenses. Sometimes without a vested interest or cost in something people tend to not place much importance on it, and food and baby sitting usually is a costly item for most churches and fellowships to absorb.

During the course people will be asked if they would be willing to stand up and give testimony at the first Sunday service following the program. These testimonies will be awesome and serve as an emphasis for growth to your church and groups..

Working with *Christianity For Today* in ministry as a leader requires only three or four hours once a week for 6 weeks, but will add new life to your Church and give you a *lifetime worth of good memories* and feelings, not-to-mention the knowledge that you helped in your own way to further the Great Commission that Jesus commanded us to be part of, saving those who do not know the truth.

We believe ***Christianity For Today* will raise up leadership within a congregation like no other ministry,** and I have been involved with lay ministry for over 35 years. ***Christianity For Today* will provide numerous roles appropriate for persons with differing gifts,** not just those of teaching and exhortation. Finally, **Christianity For Today is ecumenical.** It stresses nothing but scriptures, no dogma, no denomination, only straight forward Biblical truths.

Questions and Answers Concerning Christianity For Today

ARE YOU ANGRY AT GOD, OR CURIOUS ABOUT CHRISTIANITY?

Christianity For Today may be the answer for you.

This course is a series of instructional sessions intended to assist a devout or novice Christian or even someone who is angry at the Church, or God, in short anyone who wishes to find answers concerning Christianity. As an added bonus we believe it will help newcomers in becoming equipped to do any specific work of ministry they wish to do at home, at work, in the world, and in the church.

Y'all Come! That old southern phrase speaks volumes about hospitality, doesn't? And, it's in like manner that we invite you to "come." One night to investigate is all we ask, and dinner will be on us. *We're not trying to get you to join a church nor are we putting on a show, after all you're part of the family, our community.* What we do is explore serious questions that church and unchurched people alike have about this thing called religion.

Many of us say, "Why do I need to be heavily involved with something that started thousands of years ago, especially following teachings that came out of a life that was 2,000 years ago. I need help today with my problems. I have enough to bare the burdens of today without worrying with olden attitudes of behavior."

Okay, suppose you were on a "people mover" in an airport like Atlanta. You run to get on but just stand there with the rest of the people when you do. You are moving from one place to another with a group of people you probably do not know and will never see again, right much like many situations we find ourselves in today. We all are part of the masses of people being led by today's events to where ever we end up, maybe not where we want to be but we arrive; but, what happens if the "people mover" stops? How long will it take before some one says walk, and they all begin to do so in unison. Christ who lived 2,000 years ago says to each one of us, "walk".

We are not inviting you to be part of something that teaches you useless information from the past. No we are offering you testimonies from the past right up to and including the present time where we all are held captive in our life's events. However, we wish to help you realise, as best we can, some great and hidden mysteries disclosed by things of the past and things present. We do not have all the answers, not even all the questions, yet this we know since time began we all have asked the same thing, "Why am I here?"

During this course we will attempt to help you come to answer some of those questions that plague you, about what the past, present and the future holds for you. It is the greatest mystery you can attempt to solve and hopefully we are along with you for the ride as fellow travelers on the "people mover" called life.

From time to time we will use scripture taken from the Bible, our "*blast from the past manual*" on how to live a good life.

James 1:19-25 *"You know this, my dearly-loved brethren. But let every one be quick to hear, slow to speak, and slow to be angry. For a man's anger does not lead to action which God regards as righteous. Ridding yourselves, therefore, of all that is vile and of the evil influences which*

prevail around you, welcome in a humble spirit the Message implanted within you, which is able to save your souls. But prove yourselves obedient to the Message, and do not be mere hearers of it, imposing a delusion upon yourselves. For if any one listens but does not obey, he is like a man who carefully looks at his own face in a mirror. Although he has looked carefully at himself, he goes away, and has immediately forgotten the sort of man he is. But he who looks closely into the perfect Law—the Law of freedom—and continues looking, he, being not a hearer who forgets, but an obedient doer, will as the result of his obedience be blessed.”

Christianity for Today is simple, anyone can take the course, whether you are affiliated with a church or not, it doesn't matter. The course is designed primarily for people who have questions concerning Christianity, non-churchgoers and those who have recently become Christians. It runs normally in six consecutive weeks. There is no charge, however, contributions for meals and baby sitting accommodations are accepted.

All parts of ***Christianity For Today*** is a wonderful life changing experience for all who participate, bar none. It answers and clarifies the basics of our Christian faith and puts us on firm ground as we travel on our journey with the Lord. No one will laugh or argue with you to prove a point, *it is forbidden*. Some even yell at God if that's what it takes to clear the air we encourage it.

Have you ever been to a great event or heard a great talk and tried to tell someone about it? That's the problem we have about this course, it's hard to convey what we feel concerning how much it might help you if you attend. It costs us a great deal to do this both in time and money, yet is our gift to you, and to the community we serve; consequently we ask for a complete commitment to attend each week, if at all possible.

If done in group setting there are six, two and a half hour sessions:

Session One: *Is Christianity Really Relevant Today or Just Some Club? What is so Special About Jesus?*

Session Two: *Why Read the Bible? What's Faith Got to do With It? What's the Big Deal About Praying?*

Session Three: *Does God Really Hear Me and Why? How Can I know God Cares About Me? Does God Really Guide Me and How Do I Know?*

Session Four: *What is the Holy Spirit? What are the Gifts of Holy Spirit? Come on Does God Really Heal?*

Session Five: *How can I Change, I've Lost Hope? So What's Next?*

Session Six: *How Can I Spread the Good News to Others? What's Right and What's Wrong with the Church Today?*

With those important topics in mind and knowing that we are all short of time we must become more disciplined in our use of the time we do have. As mentioned before we propose each evening to start promptly at 6:30 with an excellent dinner, followed by a plain language talk at 7:00 (20 Min). Each talk is geared to promote discussion in the small groups. After the talk, 7:30, coffee should be available to continue a relaxed atmosphere in group settings. The group

discussions, usually involving 8-12 people, end promptly at 9:00. Child care is available each night.

This course normally is run by lay people just like you, no clergy allowed except on the edge. No intimidation, we're just regular folks and know how it feels to have doubts and fears about God and the church. There are trained leaders in each group, but only to guide and help participants stay on a track. Basically each group chooses what is discussed.

The clean up detail ideally will fall on a different team each night, should numbers allow, and all are expected to take their turn. It's part of the learning experience. We all have to pitch in if Christianity is to be relevant in today's world. We believe it is relevant and hope you will see the same and work beside us as we strive to do better things for the people of our community.

It's a great way to get a good meal and join in on some highly spirited conversation concerning Christianity. *We want to stress that the course is non-denominational and no one will try to force you to speak or become anything different than you want to be.* You are free to just listen if that's what you want to do. But, if you ask a question, your peers will do the answering. Leaders will only help and insure a strict rule of anything said in the room is private and can not be shared about or disclosed to anyone, period.

Christianity For Today has two purposes: the first is to bring people into a relationship with Jesus Christ, the second is to introduce the course to those who are called to evangelism so they can become leaders or helpers with subsequent courses. In offering the course we present you with an opportunity to become involved in Christ's commission to all of His people. Don't miss this opportunity to change your life - forever!

Being a Christian is more than getting baptized, and having your name on the rolls. Jesus has entrusted us with a Great Commission: "***Go into all the world and preach the gospel to the whole creation.***" Mark 16:15 Many of us take Christianity seriously concerning our responsibility to change the world for Jesus, *but no one has taught us how to do it.* The result has been that the Body of Christ we call the Church often functions ineffectively as we try to live out our faith in this world.

"So faith by itself, if it has no works is dead."

James 2:17

We can all profess our faith in the Lord Jesus to one another but, without the example of this faith in our daily lives we are hardly able to convince anyone that this faith is genuine. True faith is exemplified by our works and is expressed to everyone around us by the examples we set.

Christianity For Today Training

First of all I thank God for all of you who are reading this. You will be truly blessed by your efforts. You are the salt of the earth. The fact that you are here proves you are serious in your efforts to do God's work at your Church.

"For this is the will of my Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I myself shall lift him up on that last day." John 6:40

"Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, yet with gentleness and reverence." 1 Peter 3:15

"And if it is with great difficulty that the righteous man be saved, what will become of the godless man and sinner?" 1 Peter 4:18

Those three scripture personify this course. There are many other scriptures that do likewise, but we chose these for our purposes. Along with those scriptures small group evangelism provides the greatest opportunity to minister to those who need it the most, those on the periphery of Christianity. In creating this course we strove to avoid: 1) Extremes 2) Doing nothing 3) Doing the same thing other churches are doing because they are successful. Instead we vowed to always do as best we could to do with what God leads us to do and seek His success formula for living a Christian life.

Thirty percent of all denomination attendees have disappeared in the last 30 years. Plainly stated, essentially the church has lost 30 percent of its fold, please hold on to that fact. Suppose you wanted to learn to play the piano. You would seek out a great teacher, one who played well. What if the instructor told you to sit and watch as they expertly played each piece. Then after 40 "lessons" the teacher announced it was time for your first recital. You would probably fail miserably. What a shame, all those lessons and you didn't learn a thing. *Unfortunately this is the way most churches teach discipleship.* We are hoping ***Christianity for Today*** will change that aspect in many churches.

I Peter 5:1-4 ***"To the elders among you (that means leaders), I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will share in the glory to be revealed: Be shepherds of God's flock that is under your care, serving as overseers--not because you must, but because you are willing, as God wants you to be; not greedy for money, but eager to serve; not lording it over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock. And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away."***

And in I Peter 2:9 ***"...you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light."***

Then to Ephesians 4:11,12 ***"...He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:"***

Now to Matthew 7:24,25 ***"Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock."***

After reading those scriptures I think we can be safe in saying: NO ONE IS CALLED TO DO NOTHING. Instead, everyone who calls Him Lord is called to be part of spreading the news in some manner. And in that same vein, leadership in the Church should be everyone's potential! Leader's are supposed to train up new leaders. That of course means *leaders must often step aside in order for the next leader to come into their own.* At Your Church everyone ought be either a leader of an intern on the way to leadership. This is what Christ taught, *is it not?*

Let's look at to Luke 6:46 **"Why do you call me, 'Lord, Lord,' and do not do what I say?"** Yes, your Church is a great church with a great calling; and many of you have been at it for a long time. However, God is calling us as leaders to do something additional to what we have done in the past. Something we maybe should have already been doing.

Through His grace and guidance, we up to this point, certainly have blessed and fed the multitudes that came into our midst; yet, we are bursting at the seam with outreach potential. I believe God is saying, now is the time for our Churches to reach full potential; and we can if we are willing to do what God shows us to do. Today we have an opportunity to do some things we were not able to do before. However, we must teach and lead the congregation, so they will follow, seeing what we see, doing what we do.

Your Church has many great ongoing ministries, yet, they are supported by a few dedicated people; however how much longer can the few bear the burden? Unfortunately as we grow the percentages of active people are not changing. We need to get the laity more fully involved.

Much of our evangelism is centered around "seeker" or "contemporary services." There we have dedicated and mature Christian leaders who feel the calling of the Lord toward those on the periphery. In this course we will strive to do the best we can to display the attitude of: **1) One who is saved 2) a Servant 3) a Spirit filled person, manifesting the fruits of the Spirit 4) a person sensitive to the needs of others, never wounding, instead doing our best to bring hurting people into a place of healing.**

Obviously we all have baggage, smoking, gambling, pornography, drugs, sexual problems, etc; no one escapes this world without being scarred by Satan and his forces. With that in mind we believe *Holy Spirit is brooding over the Bride of Christ just as He was during creation itself.* He is getting the Church ready for the greatest revival the world has ever known. This revival will primarily start to take place inside Churches, so the Church, the people, will be ready for the Bridegroom. We believe the program of **Christianity for Today** is the perfect way to reach people, creating an ongoing outreach that will extend far beyond our ability to comprehend.

All ministries and programs should meet the basic criteria for meeting new convert's needs at three levels, **1) at church, 2) at home, and 3) in the community.** *God is continuing to build His Church,* so all ministries should strive for growth in at least these categories, through the power of the Holy Spirit. *Through Community:* being peaceful, sharing, inspiring covenant relationships. And, *through Caring:* meeting needs both physical and spiritual, loving and showing concern, compassion, being task and service oriented. And *by Ministering:* bearing one another's burdens, giving blessings because blessings were given, visitation, support and recovery.

We need to PRAY, PRAY, GET ON OUR FACE PRAYER, *not just naming but spelling out specifics.* Pray not only for your leadership at your Church but for better, more righteous, leaders for our nation and our national church. Look what they have done to our church nationally!

When was the last time you wept while you prayed for the lost souls, or your country or your church? *Yet, we weep for those in pain and suffering that we are close to. Is it because we*

distance ourselves from these aspects? Scriptures say we do not have because we do not ask. We need to be bold in our prayer life, asking daily for miracles for our churches.

LEADERSHIP SHOULD BE EVERYONE'S POTENTIAL at your Church. We must get the laity more involved in what it ought to be about, and the pastors and staff what they ought to be about. Meaning, most of the burdens could be laid squarely on the shoulders of many, *instead of the few* who often now do the work. We are too good at perpetuating the 80/20 Rule. *We need to turn that upside-down making it 80 percent of the people doing the work of ministry and let the 20 percent be those learning how to minister.*

I am sure many of you will attest to the fact that... sometimes we need a break... a breather from heavy duties. A wide-open leadership training program will go a long way toward implementing this. Not difficult or arduous training, but those bordering on what we have in place in ministries now. Training and encompassing new people into ministry, fully informed and capable. As the changes we believe God is initiating unfold, and additional people will step forward to do their part, taking their commission from Jesus seriously. Each person will need training within each ministry. *As leaders, the burden falls on you.*

Look at Luke 15:1-7. ***“Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, ‘Rejoice with me; I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you that in that same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over the ninety-nine righteous persons who don’t need to repent.”***

Turn to John 15:14-16 ***“You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last.”***

Jesus wants us to realize His mission then and now, through us, is to save the lost. *He wants us to realize how much each lost soul means to Him.* He wants us to see the distance we must also be willing to go to do the same in His name, as He has commanded us to.

Jesus has shown how infinite our value is to Him, and bids us to show the world they too can come and rest in His ever abiding love and care. *We must not forget this.* *If we do, are we any different than the slave who was forgiven, and while basking in that forgiveness, neglected to do the same for another? It’s our job... Jesus gave it to us, to bring in the lost fold, and all the heavens will rejoice.*

Please pray. It is above all else your greatest part in ***Christianity for Today.*** Without being bathed in prayer this course is just another program destined to fail. Give Holy Spirit room to work in your life and in this program, it is essential. When you pray, give it all to the Lord, praying for both the leaders and your people, the ones who you are to guide. It is easy to become complacent, figuring God will take care of us anyway. Nevertheless, go through your places where you meet, your rooms, when you set it up, or check it out pray for each person who sits in each chair. Don’t forget the chapel, praying in the Spirit for those who will attend and for yourself. Consecrate your battle ground for that is what it is.

Recognize there are four purposes for Christianity for Today. **1) Ministry 2) Lead to Christ 3) bring to Body of Christ 4) Make Leaders.** Please make this paramount in your mind concerning what you do in the small group setting.

Remember: *Don’t teach, guide; and listen, let Holy Spirit do His work.* We are called to step aside, turning discussions back to them, guiding them to where Holy Spirit can let them come to their own conclusions.

Please, please, always ask: What notes did you take while listening to the talk and are you willing to share with the group, give them ample time to share. Wait them out, let the silence be deafening. When a question is asked say to the group, "What do you think?" Always ask about specific areas you feel Holy Spirit is leading you to; but, don't teach, never teach. It does not matter that you are an expert and know your subject well enough to lead in a teaching moment, their notes are extremely important to that end. It is through this mutual or shared teachings that any meaningful decision will emerge. Don't jump in and answer when there is silence, they will talk, let them encourage each other.

If you feel the topic is beginning to fragment, inject scripture to bring them into a full circle back to the word of God concerning the subject. Watch if they are beginning to get off topic, a little is okay, yet, keep the conversation on target as well as you can and still keep good comradery. Let Holy Spirit have His way.

When a heavy area comes up, and it will, remember don't argue about your view point trying to impress them into what you believe, DO NOT HAVE AN AGENDA. Be a good listener and a question asker. If needed tell them you will find out the answer or ask them to check with their pastors. You are not supposed to have all the answers; don't intimate that you do. Remember the phrase, "Well, what do you think".

Keep the discussion going, almost never answering questions, instead ask them what they think, of course if pinned down by the group and it will surely happen be prepared to answer them in brevity. First ask them: "What do you feel? What does that say to you? What do you think that means?". As a Helper person please note, you too are a leader. If we say Christianity for Today Leaders, that includes you too. The only distinction is in overall leadership of the group. Make sure between Leader and Helper there is no question as to who is in charge during the group sessions. Please don't make any distinctions within your group as to who is a helper and who is a participant at first. They will figure it out on their own as the weeks go by; but don't make it a secret either. It's okay when the second leader is identified, so when needed they can take over and there won't be any problems within the group.

Be sure you have read the talk as it was printed, knowing each person who presents a talk is free to change areas when they feel led to, so always take notes yourself when things appear changed, being ready to lead the group accordingly. Above all, be filled with Holy Spirit and the love of Jesus, displaying the power of God to those who Christ gave us to minister to. Display only the Fruits of the Spirit, self-control being a biggy here. And, especially push no agenda, doing so might allow you to win a skirmish but lose the war. Let Holy Spirit move, if you do everybody wins, except Satan.

Create a climate of acceptance. Most people who are unsure of their beliefs or are angry at the church are reluctant to voice their feelings because they are fearful of what others might think. Make sure all participants know each comment is appreciated. If however something is said that needs correction do so lovingly and respectfully; do not allow the group to be led astray. Nevertheless, do not attack or condemn the person, simply lead them to the truth by asking them such things as, "What led you to this conclusion?"

Discourage the group from believing you to be the authority, let them see you as a facilitator instead, just a member of the group. Actively listen to what is being said and who said it, trying to discern why they are thinking the way they do, carefully form questions to lead them to the truth. Do not force anyone to talk, when the time comes they will. Do not take sides, encourage each person to think the issue through carefully. Do not allow one person to

monopolize the discussion including yourself.

Remember you are a pastor of a flock; like the Good Shepard do not allow your flesh to speak to your flock. Your flock can sense where you are coming from. Flesh conveys fears, wrong motives, your own problems or inequities can destroy while Holy Spirit leads to healings. Only Holy Spirit can bring fullness where brokenness existed.

When dealing with sometimes difficult people pray and display God's "LUCK". I am talking about luck spelled: **L**-OVE of God; **U**-NDERSTANDING of God; **C**-OMPASSION of God; **K**-NOWLEDGE of God.

Always steer participants toward small group fellowships when they are formed and available. Consider starting one yourself, ask your pastors about it. It is the vision of this program that such groups would spring up allowing discipling of those who emerge from the program and reaching out to others. Please give this your prayerful consideration.

Christianity For Today Session One

PRAY: *Lord God, we thank You that You are here,... as we are gathered in Your Name,... seeking answers,... seeking truth,... lead us to that higher rock, ... Your True Wisdom, ... for we are sometimes fearful of the things we face.*

Come Holy Spirit, inhabit our minds,... bodies, and souls,... that we may in Your Guidance find completeness. Grant us some new vision of Your Truth;... and give us the strength we will need to live it according to Your Wishes. AMEN

Everybody Sing: *God Will Make a Way*

Before every session you will be given something for taking notes with. Please do so. What you get out of this course depends on you and those in your group talking about what you think is important points or questions.

First of all... I am not a professional Christian... not a paid staff person. I am what is commonly called a Lay Person... in other words... one of you. I don't get paid a nickel for my services at the church nor does anyone who is part of this event. We are no different than you, we just have different experiences. Furthermore, none of us will try to change your mind concerning what you believe verses what we believe; we leave such matters up to God. Yet please be assured we are all devout Christians. We believe in the Bible in its entirety. So please respect our beliefs and know we will respect yours. Also, this is not an attempt to bring you into the membership of our church; yet, it is an attempt to bring you into God's Kingdom and to His living Church.. Do you know what church means? It is not buildings, no church in this instance means people who follow God.

Okay that being said, the old joke about planting grass had a punch line of "green side up". That made planting grass simple; tonight we hope to do the same for you about Christianity, make it simple, just keep saying to yourself when it seems complicated, "**green side up**".

Is Christianity Really Relevant Today or Just Some Club? What the question really means is: *Does Christianity matter in today's world? Or more explicitly, how can anything that happened over 2,000 years ago have any thing to do with me today?* And usually an underlying question: *Why do I have to attend Church?* Or you might be asking, just what is the Church all about?

Fact: it is undeniable that throughout all history mankind sought and worshiped a higher being. All of us were created with a yearning to seek a relationship with God.

Fact: Christianity is not really a religion but a way of life; and, the Church is not buildings at all, it is the people.

Bernard Levin wrote: *"Countries like ours are full of people who have all the material comforts they desire, yet we lead lives of quiet desperation, understanding nothing but the fact that there is a hole inside of us that no matter how much food and drink we pour into it, how many expensive cars and TVs and how many well balanced children and loyal friends we parade around we still ache, and that ache requires God."*

You can have everything in the world and still be bitter and lonely without a relationship with God; and, *Christianity brings that into fruition making you into a fellow heir to the Kingdom of God through becoming adopted as Christ's brother.* Did you get that, as Christ's

adopted brother. Next time you pray the Lord's Prayer say to yourself, this is my brother's prayer to His Father, my Father. As an added bonus for accepting Christ as your Lord and Savior you get many, many blessings here on earth and in heaven and afterward a life of eternity with God.

Let there be no mistake even if you do not choose God through His Son Jesus Christ you will live eternally, it's just you will live eternally in not such a nice place, instead you will find yourself completely devoid of God's presence and His Blessings. Hell is such a place. God gives us this choice.

Have you tried to pick up signals on a TV with only rabbit ears for an antenna, especially if you live too far way to pick up a significant signal? That's a good example of trying to be a good Christian without attending and participating in church activities; so yes, Christianity is very relevant on a personal level.

When Jesus comes back for the Church He is not seeking buildings; He is coming to claim people who follow His teachings, His way of life. Man, unfortunately, has a tendency to create organizations in which they feel comfortable. Sometimes what I feel comfortable with, you do not and vice versa. Add to the situation, bureaucracy, and you multiply the problem since such organizations tend to support themselves rather than what they were originally formed for.

Christianity is absolutely true, those of us who are here to present this program to you are living witnesses to its truth. We have tested it from all aspects of our life. You too can examine Christianity by reading the many books written by experts, that are available; but it is important to listen to the people who are willing to share what being a Christian really means in their life. John Bunyan was imprisoned in the seventeenth century England for preaching the Gospel. During his 12 years in prison he wrote the classic *Pilgrim's Progress*, a book constantly reprinted even today. His book is responsible for bringing thousands and thousands of people to Christ. Would he sacrifice so much of his life for just a foible, an untrue story... I think not. Since Christianity actually is true, it is of vital importance today, in the same manner that it was in all the yesterdays combined.

When the church first existed it was simply called, "The Way". People banded together, supporting each other, because to separate from what was then the norm meant you lost your family ties, your way of making a living, and most of your friends would exclude you as though you did not exist. You ate together, you struggled together, you became a family of the Lord. Furthermore, early Christians were persecuted, even fed to the lions.

As far as relevance: If in fact the Church is irrelevant in today's society what does that say about us individually? It has often been said, "Evil abounds when good men do nothing." If you don't take an active role in the Church are you in fact causing its relevance to worsen? History shows us time and time again by doing nothing we condone what is happening around us. According to experts, most middle class Americans *worship their work... work at their play... and play at their worship.*

This poem from an anonymous source speaks volumes:
I was hungry and you formed a humanities club to discuss my hunger.
I was imprisoned and you crept off quietly to pray for my release.
I was naked and you debated the morality of my appearance.
I was sick and you thanked God for your health.
I was homeless and you preached to me about the shelter of God's love.
I was lonely and you left me alone to pray for me.
You seem so holy, so close to God;
but I'm still very hungry, lonely, cold, and in pain.
Does it really matter to you?

Well over 80% of Americans profess to be Christians, yet less than 10% are actively involved in the church. Consequently some churches have aligned themselves with programs that do not stand for the things which are essentially the truth, that which is found in the Bible; rather they preach the reflection they see in a worldly mirror. Though they might feel a tugging from Holy Spirit, they desire a unity of people rather than with Christ. They call for dialogue, conferences, meaningful discussions, the need for unity... all for the purposes that their agendas may move forward, while pleading for people who do not believe as they do to remain silent for the sake of unity. Yet, what will the unified people say when they stand before Jesus?

Matthew 25:31-46: ***"When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, then He will sit on His glorious throne. Before Him will be gathered all the nations, and He will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. And He will place the sheep on His right, but the goats on the left. Then the King will say to those on His right, 'Come, you who are blessed by My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave Me food, I was thirsty and you gave Me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed Me, I was naked and you clothed Me, I was sick and you visited Me, I was in prison and you came to Me.' Then the righteous will answer him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? And when did we see You a stranger and welcome You, or naked and clothe You? And when did we see You sick or in prison and visit You?' And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me.'***

"Then He will say to those on His left, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave Me no food, I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome Me, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.' Then they also will answer, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

So who is this God who demands so much of us; how do we learn more about Him? ***Read the Bible***, it's a manual for living in today's world and for getting to know who God is. Some people say the letters that spell Bible means ***Basic Instructions Before Leaving Earth***. That's what manuals are supposed to be about, right? Sure it is ancient history, yet it holds the key to knowing God even today; what He is all about and how much He loves us. Yes it has parts that are hard to understand, but when you were going to school you studied to pass a test; well the test is for the prize of eternity with God and He wants you to pass it free of charge.

Matthew 6:24: ***"No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."***

Frank A. Viola said, "Scripture is undeniably clear that all who possess the indwelling life of the Risen Lord comprise the real Church. The natural implication of this glorious truth is that the church is a family whose members are joined together, connected, and inseparably related by Devine Life. One cannot join the church. If you are in Christ you are joined already and that by birth (rebirth)."

If you were part of the first century Christian Church you did not need to jump through religious hoops. You learned how to be a Christian by being discipled by your brothers and sisters in the Lord. You became a mature Christian by being part of an active and alive group of people who were held together by a common desire to serve the Lord and preserve "The Way".

We all have done substantial damage to Christ's Church. We all have much to repent from. Even if a church has fabulous praise music and terrific speakers and great evangelic programs but is not a close family of believers who willingly pull their load and lovingly help others learn to do the same, they cannot be truly a Biblical Church. *Loving one another must be of paramount importance* to the church or they are straying from the Bible's teachings. We believe Jesus is waiting and watching for this to happen so He can come and find His true Bride. If we belong to Christ then we belong to each other. John 13:35: "***By this they shall know you are My disciples, that you love one another.***"

What is so special about Jesus and why do we need Him? Some believe Christianity requires blind faith. It does require faith, *but faith based on historic evidence.* **FACT:** Two Roman historians Tacitus and Suetonius along with a Jewish historian Josephus, around 37 AD mention Jesus and His people in their writings. **FACT:** The entire history of the Roman Empire is based on only 68 copies of manuscripts written from 900-1,100 years later. While 24,300 copies of manuscripts of the New Testament which were compiled only 130-350 years later exist.

Jesus was fully man. He had a body. He became tired and hungry. He had human experiences, was tempted, learned, worked, and obeyed his parents. Some people say He was only a human, or a good moral teacher, not divine. What evidence is there that Jesus was what Christians say He was? He said in John 14:6, "***I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.***" This mean only through having a relationship with Jesus can we truly encounter God in His fullness.

Jesus said in John 6:35, "***I am the bread of life.***" He also said in John 8:12, "***I am the light of the world. Whoever follows Me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.***" And in John 11:25, 26 Jesus says, "***I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die.***" He claimed in Mark 2:5 that He had authority to forgive sins saying, "**Son, your sins are forgiven.**" In Matthew 25:31-32 Jesus claimed He would judge the world.

What if someone said, you will all have to appear before me and I will decide your life for all eternity. That would be preposterous you say, no one would be stupid enough to say that and no one would follow him. Jesus made such direct claims by answering a question in Mark 14:61-64, "***Are you the Christ, the son of the Blessed one?***" Jesus said, "***I am... and you will see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of the Mighty One and coming on the clouds of heaven***" Thomas, spoke to Jesus saying, "My Lord , my God." Jesus did not say to him, "No, no, I'm not God." Instead He said, "***Because you have seen Me, you have believed: blessed are those who have not seen and yet believe.***" (John 20:29)

The fact that someone claims to be something does not make it true. Many people believe they are people from past times or even believe they are Jesus. So how do we know? If his claims were untrue and He knew they were, He was either evil or, he was delusional or indeed mad. On top of that, would you be willing to die to masquerade as savior of the world when they wanted to crucify you? Or, as His follower would you be willing to die for an outright lie? The greatest possibility of all these is that His claims were true.

Jesus' teachings are universally accepted as the greatest words the world has ever known. They are the foundation of our entire western world's morality and legal system. No one has

improved on His teachings. Could teachings such as that be from a madman or con artist? He also performed countless miracles and fulfilled over 300 major Old Testament prophecies, 29 in one day alone. No one could control that many elements, or the exact method of His death and the place of His burial, much less where He was born.

His resurrection is the cornerstone of Christianity. What evidence is there that it is true; the absence of his body in the tomb? Many have suggested the body was stolen, or that He was not dead. That would be a trick that the entire Roman empire could not pull off. Jesus had undergone Roman flogging under which many died; He was nailed to a cross for six hours; the soldiers were clearly convinced He was dead. If they allowed the prisoner to escape it would mean sure death for them; one even pierced His side, bringing forth water and blood; a sure sign of His death. The disciples would not have stolen His body. They were disillusioned and afraid to be seen in public and basically ran to hide.

Later He appeared to the disciples and over 550 people after his death. He was no ghost. He could be touched; He ate; He drank; He cooked breakfast for the disciples; He had long conversations with them, teaching them many things about the Kingdom of God. Plus, countless people down through the ages have experienced the risen Christ. Evidence that He rose from the dead is extensive. If you desire more proof, read, ***The Case For Christ***, by Lee Strobel.

Whether we are willing to admit it or not, no matter what we accomplish we can never completely be happy unless that void we often feel is filled with a personal and loving relationship with God. Wealthy or successful people often talk about feeling lonely or empty even when in a room full of people, as if a deep chunk is missing in their life. At one time in our life we all try to fill that emptiness in various ways. Aristotle Onassis, one of the richest men in the world said, "Millions in wealth do not always add up to what a man needs out of life." We try money, drugs, sex, alcohol, career, music, sports, hard work, and power. Although they offer instant gratification we are still left with a hollow feeling.

Even the closest relationship we can have can not always satisfy that deep emptiness. Scripture tells us the reason for that emptiness is that we turned our backs on God. Jesus said, "***I am the bread of life***." (John 6:35) He is the only one who can satisfy that yearning: He is the only way we can regain that closeness to God we unconsciously desire. Without Him it is impossible to be restored to God. Through Jesus, and with a personal relationship with Him, we are saved. "***He has also set eternity in the hearts of men***." (Ecclesiastes 3:11)

It was once said, "Man cannot live without meaning." And with that in mind, sooner or later we all ask, "What is the meaning of life?" "What am I doing here?" "Is there any purpose in my life?" Until we find a true relationship with God through Jesus we will never find complete answers to such questions or find true meaning for much of anything. Things may provide a passing fancy, but it will not last. Only a true relationship with our creator will suffice.

As a young person, we usually do not think much about death, it seems to be a long way off; in doing so we fail to face much of what is reality. The fact is we all begin the dying process the moment we are born. Let's face it most people don't want to die. We want to survive beyond death. We are like the man who said his goal was to live eternally. Then he said, "So far so good". Actually your true eternal life starts when you accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior.

Jesus said in Mark 7:20-23, "***What comes out of a man is what makes him `unclean.'*** ***For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man `unclean.'***"

Our greatest need is forgiveness, to be absolved. As a man with an illness needs treatment, we inherently need forgiveness from God, to escape death as result of our sins. In Jesus we find such forgiveness. His death on the cross paid for our sins, enabling us to have a right relationship with God.

Okay if Jesus is such a great person and God is such a loving God Why did Jesus have to die? The New Testament tells us He died for our sins. ***“All have sinned and fall short of the Glory of God.”*** (Romans 6:23)

I don't need this Christianity business, I'm happy as I am: I've always been a good person, you may be saying; *compared to regular society that may be true*. God, however, uses a different measuring stick, Jesus, His Boy. In measuring up to Jesus, we all fall short. What if everything you ever did wrong was displayed before your friends and family, or to the people in your church? We all would fail the test of righteousness. “Ah ha,” you say. “But, Jesus died for our sins.” Yes! You got the point!

James 2:10 indicates that *if we break any of God's laws we are guilty of breaking them all*. John 8:34, tells us *anyone who sins is a slave to sin*. Obviously we all fall short with respect to sin, and it is that same sinful nature that keeps us from having a right relationship with God. We all deserve to be punished for our sins.

In ***Miracle on the River Kwai***, by Earnest Gordon, a story which took place during WWII in a POW camp, a Japanese guard became very angry when a shovel used in a work project came up missing. He asked for the return of the shovel; when it was not, the entire camp was threatened. If the guilty party did not step forward the guard would kill everyone. One man stepped forward to take the blame. While silently standing at attention the man was clubbed to death. Later that night the tools were counted again, they found no shovels missing. Yet the man went forward as a substitute to save the others. Like that man, Jesus stepped forward to take the punishment of our sins.

Paul tells us ***“the wages of sin is death.”*** (Romans 6:23); The death he is speaking of concerns not only a physical death, but spiritual death. The good news of Christianity is that God loves us and does not leave us in the mess we make. He came to earth, in the person of Jesus Christ to die for our sins instead of us, a substitute. (II Corinthians 5:21; Galatians 3:13); Our true redemption comes by way of Jesus Christ. (Romans 3:24); Jesus by way of the cross paid the ransom price. (Mark 10:45); We are free from the power of sin since Jesus sets us free. (John 8:36) Not that we won't sin again, *for we will*, yet, the hold sin has over us is broken, *now we can have true fellowship with God!*

In the Old Testament, a scape goat was used, the sinner laid hands on the goat confessing sins, and sent the goat into the wilderness. However, Hebrews 10:4 says that it was, ***“impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sins.”*** Christ alone is able, and He did it freely, out of both love for us and that of His love for God.

So why not try Jesus? Simply give Him a chance. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain. He will not disappoint you, for He loves you and said, ***“would that all be saved.”***

LET'S CLOSE WITH A PRAYER: Oh Lord God, You who are all knowing are patient, help us to understand. Speak that we may learn Your voice and from where it came. Create in us a clean heart and a right spirit that we may know and serve You now and forever. AMEN
And, please remember: What is said inside the groups, stays inside the groups.

Christianity For Today Session Two

PRAY: Lord God, Heavenly Father, you made the heavens and earth and that You even take thought of us is awesome indeed. Yet, You promised You have known us since before we were in our mother's womb. Show us oh Lord, Your wisdom, we ask this in humble adoration. Speak to us and help us find in an ever deepening relationship with You, both now and forever. Amen.

Everybody Sing: God Will Make a Way

WHY Read the Bible? Most of it is about people who lived over 2,000 years ago and I have a hard time understanding parts of it?

When you were going to school did you understand all the curriculum that was presented to you at first, or did you have to study hard, fearful of not passing? Since you became Christian have you done the same? With God the life you lead is your daily and even final exam.

“Man shall not live by bread alone He must have peanut butter.” Is that the right quote? Okay then, what is the right quote? How do we know what is right? Read Matthew 4:1-4 In this verse Jesus is quoting scripture to Satan. We too should do the same when we are confronted with evil in our life, confront Satan with scripture.

Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon, the richest, most powerful, and the wisest man who ever lived. He said it all boils down to: nothing on earth is worth doing, nothing is lasting, nothing will bring you joy, except that it be done according to and through God. Sitting in the pew won't get it I promise you!

CHRISTIANITY, ought to be classified as a verb. Read the Bible and pray, in doing so you will receive the Word of God, which is more powerful than any epic novel that you might want to read; it's GOD'S LOVE LETTER TO ALL MANKIND, which is speaking to each of us PERSONALLY.

“The Bible is alive, it speaks to me. It has feet. It runs after me. It loves me from cradle to grave,” so said Martin Luther and me.

God knew me before I was born. I believe that. WHY? it's in the book, the Bible. Jeremiah 1:5, Isaiah 44:24 and Job 10:11 says the same thing. You were fearfully and wonderfully made. Don't let Satan or anybody else put you down. I myself struggle with this; I am my worst enemy. I try though, and someday I will be victorious.

In the Bible, God gave us a complete library, many do not know that. While the Bible is printed as though one book, it nevertheless contains 66 books, written by many authors, yet all guided in their writing by God through the Holy Spirit. In order to properly study the Bible you must look at it this way, as a library of books.

Some people say I don't want a rule book like the Bible! Nevertheless, how can you gain freedom unless you know the rules? The entire western civilization with respect to the courts and our moral standard is based on the Bible and what Jesus' taught.

The Old Testament is arranged in sections: Law, History, Poetry, Major Prophets and Minor Prophets. The New Testament is sectioned: Gospels, History, Letters from Paul, General Letters and Prophecy.

Please don't try to read the Bible as one book, you'll get lost. Read each book separately, refer back and forth, they agree with one another.

This is the most important book on the face of the earth. The Bible contains the history of thousands of generations of people falling in and out of love with God and of God loving them in spite of their situations. What you will never find is any part which says God never did anything, but, love his people. Through it all God ran after them. And He continues to do the same today!

Don't give up if you get confused in reading the Bible, ask God to reveal what He has for you. Even the disciples were sometimes confused. Biblical passages were written by kings, scholars, philosophers, fishermen, poets, statesmen, historians, and doctors, in different types of literature, in history, poetry, prophecy, apocalyptic-writings, and letters.

What's Faith Got to do with it? When we do research we must exercise faith, depending on what others did before us. We accept some work as right or we will drive ourselves crazy examining details already proven. Many of us depend on a sort of osmosis attempt of learning in our lives. We have said I'm through with school, letting the world teach us. In doing so you're saying to God, "I can handle this job all by myself. I'll let you know when I need you." If that describes your knowledge and your closeness to God then hang onto your hat as you begin truly begin allowing Holy Spirit to disclose them to you, you are in for the JOY-ride of your life. You will learn how to become a more complete and successful person, a Christian. Instead of being fed to the lions. you will be triumphant.

As you read, mark your bible, *study it*, like your life depended on it, for it does, not your eternal life though, for that is a gift from God if you accept Jesus Christ as you Lord and Savior; but, your new life does, the here and now, the Kingdom of God on earth. When you're finished don't say I finally finished; now I won't have to do that again. Each time you read any passage from the Bible you will receive a new insight and the Bible brings to us an ever abiding faith enabling us to be more like Him. It brings joy and peace in the midst of a storm. It gives you new guidance.

Many hundreds of thousands have died so this book can be read today. Why would people all over the world risk their life and limb to possess such a book? What is so important about the Bible? The creator of the universe, gave us a vehicle to know and understand Him. IMAGINE THE PERSON YOU ADMIRE THE MOST. Now imagine they are giving you not only a biography, but the history of ALL their people, the mistakes they made, and on top of that, they reveal what they and their people personally believe, and know to be true. Wouldn't you want to read such a book to find out what their secrets were, their ways of doing what impresses you.

IT IS WISE TO START WITH A REALISTIC GOAL FOR BIBLE READING. Don't be too overambitious, set aside say seven minutes everyday, to start with, then build. I suggest you START WITH THE GOSPELS: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Then STUDY ROMANS 12-15 AND I CORINTHIANS 13 & 14, they will expand your knowledge of what being a Christian is all about what God expects of us. If you're reading a version that's hard for you to read, get one that suits you.

Start by picking the time, place and amount of reading you plan to do, asking God to speak to you through the passages you read. As you read, ask yourself what the passages mean. Compare different translations if needed to clarify them. Who wrote it. Who first read it? If you have a commentary, what does it say? How does it apply to you, your family, work, neighbors and the society around you? Then put what you learn to practice in your life, family and community.

What are some of the words, topics, names, locations of where it happened. Check it out, take notes, even making an outline and memorizing meaningful scripture. Like you did in school, write papers, make a journal everyday and date it. It'll do you good to look back on it.

Read it with an open mind letting God reveal Himself to you. Your revelation from God. See how it fits with other passages. Notice the purpose, pondering in quiet prayer what it means, study the background, the who, where, why of it. Learn its theme, the parts that are special to you. Ask how God's will is expressed through what you have now learned. How can you carry this throughout the rest of your life?

And, remember the Bible was not given to increase our knowledge, but to increase our knowing of God, and to change our lives, becoming more useful to His purposes-that of helping to save those who do not know Him, taking them too into eternal life.

One day Jesus will come back for His willing servants, to establish a new heaven and earth. Then those who are in Christ will "be with the Lord forever" (Revelation 21:1) We will see Jesus face to face (1 Corinthians 13:12); and, given glorious painless resurrection bodies (1 Corinthians 15), and be transformed into the mortal likeness of Jesus Christ (1 John 3:2).

"Are you saved brother," was a catch phrase when I was growing up. Professing to be a Baptist, a Christian in defense I always answered in the affirmative, "Yes!" But, I really was not. I only used the term as a vaccination against the question, and a badge to use at Church. I was baptized and taught Sunday school and did Christian things, but had little faith.

I thought some of the scriptures were little more than fairy tales, until I decided to give Christ a try. Then all the pieces that I thought were an un-fixable puzzle fell into place. I then without a shadow of doubt knew the God who created everything loved me and did all the things the scripture told of.

The vengeful God I had grown accustomed to walking away from suddenly became the Loving God who had been chasing after me for 27 years. Now I know where I will be spending eternity. I will spend it with Him. You too can have new life, a life full of the promises from God. A Life full of Faith!

What's the Big Deal About Praying? In the same vein how do we communicate?

"Well, it's sort of like talking," you say.

Yes, but it's much more. It means to exchange ideas or messages.

The world continuously sends messages into outer space, listening for aliens to reply; it hears none. That's not communication. It's like talking to a rock or a hardheaded obstinate child, you get nothing in return for your side of the conversation.

HOW EFFECTIVE ARE YOU AT COMMUNICATION? Are you a listener or someone waiting to jump in, not listening to what others say, you're busy remembering what it is YOU want to say and miss the point of what they just said.

HOW ABOUT YOUR COMMUNICATION WITH GOD?

Prayer is my favorite subject. It boggles my mind the completeness of it. We can't fully grasp what we are capable of doing when we pray. WE CAN EFFECT THE ENTIRE CREATION IN BOTH SPIRITUAL AND PHYSICAL REALMS. What power He has reserved for us. What love He shows in that He would allow us to do or be such creatures.

"Satan laughs at our words. Mocks at our toil; but, trembles when we pray," the old saying goes.

The Gallup Polls say, 90% of Americans profess to pray. Yet, what kind of prayers do they say?

Even with Christians, mostly we do all the talking, hoping God is listening. Does He always? Usually, but, a ridiculous one-way conversation with *anyone* does not work effectively you have to listen for an answer. Unfortunately sometimes our conversations with God disclose only one thing, we want our needs met and “THAT’S-ALL-FOLKS!” It points out our spiritual lacking doesn’t it?

What would have happened if the disciples had done all the talking, instead of learning from Jesus. What about when we went to school, or to professional seminars or training sessions. If we have any concern about learning we choose to listen more than talk, or else we learn little.

Matthew 6:6 ***“When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father who is unseen.”***

FIRST AND FOREMOST get yourself a REGULAR SCHEDULED PRAYER AND STUDY TIME you decide when that is and keep it, making an appointment with God.

He will be there make sure you are. Pause a moment to collect your thoughts, getting your mind on Jesus and how He saved you from a sure death, accepting you as His brother and fellow heir to His throne.

If a song flashes in your mind sing it, simply begin to thank God for sending His Son that you may get to know Him. Then chat with God about it. IT’S EASY DON’T MAKE IT COMPLICATED.

Then keep that prayer attitude throughout the day.

In your prayer life you want a relationship between you and God to develop, not a ritual. It’s sort of like plugging a power tool into the socket; or, pouring gasoline in the automobile. Without it we fail to go very far.

Remember you are in vertical conversation, a two-way communication with the Creator of the universe. Treat your prayer for what it is and not what it isn’t. Jesus said in Matthew 6:9 ***“Pray then this way.”*** He gave us the Lord’s Prayer. He didn’t say, always pray this prayer and that’s all, though we often offer it up when we say our prayers and worship Him. The Lord’s Prayer or any PRAYER is not a required prayer to communicate with God, The Lord’s Prayer is a guideline, one prayer to study to learn how Jesus Christ prayed.

Yet, sometimes even a so called MATURE Christian must look for the response in order to find it. What does it mean to be a mature Christian? I am not sure, because none of us are really ever to the point of crossing the finish line, maturity keeps moving doesn’t it? Yet, I think you are mature when you finally reach a point that you trust God in all things, and stop blaming and getting angry at Him because you didn’t get your way about something you wanted.

Have you ever noticed how the spelling of MATURE and manure are similar. Did you ever think that sometimes a little manure can make us mature? JESUS TOLD US ABOUT THE TREE THAT WAS NOT PRODUCING FRUIT. The Master ordered it cut down, but the man tending the garden pleaded saying he would fertilize and dig around the roots one more time, if the Master would give it one more chance.

Yet we get angry when God plops a load of manure on us. We still don’t get it do we? How small we are to think we know God’s will about everything. Did you ever get angry at God when He worked around your roots?

“No?”

Well how about the time when you didn’t get the little red wagon, the healing, the promotion, the ministry or something else you wanted badly. The Master gardner, potter, stone-cutter or whatever you needed at the time, is always at work! We must DEVELOP FAITH that He knows what He is doing.

He wants us to come and talk with Him, like Adam and Eve. God yearns for that relationship with you and me.

REMEMBER PRAYER IS GOD'S SECOND GREATEST GIFT! THINK ABOUT IT BEFORE YOU PRAY. YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO COMMUNICATE WITH GOD THROUGH JESUS CHRIST AND THE HOLY SPIRIT. UNITED WITH THEM AS FRIENDS, YOU ARE COMING INTO THE HOLY COURTS OF GOD. Pray against a wandering mind, be quiet, at peace, be humble and forthright, admitting you are not worthy to come into His presence except through His mercy and Jesus Christ, who is always with you. GOD'S OFFICE NEVER KEEPS US FROM ENTERING INTO HIS CHAMBER. HE IS ALWAYS READY TO HEAR. You needn't ask for permission though, He has given you that right. Listen and wait until your heart tells you to speak.

Jack Kennedy was the first president to have little children in the White House for a long time. Little John John would burst into the President's office on occasion with a problem, sometimes crying. President Kennedy immediately became Daddy and scooped him up, consoled him and walked out of the office with him in his arms. No matter what you felt about Kennedy, he gave us a picture of what it is to call on God.

As a child of God, listen for His answers, His guidance, His leading in your heart. If you are confused concerning this, talk to a strong Christian who has YOUR best interests at heart one you trust. Ask them about hearing God and understanding His direction for YOUR life.

PRAY TO THE CREATOR OF THE HEAVENS ABOVE, through the cleansing blood of Christ. Let there be no mistake to whom you are praying, you are communicating with the whole trinity. Your loving very own Father the Creator of everything, including counterfeit gods. He is more than just awake He listens to us as we pray, knowing what we are and what we shall become, even the hairs on our head.

There are many types of prayer. Tonight I will give you five building blocks that you can rely on for your prayer life: *ADORATION, CONFESSION, THANKSGIVING, INTERCESSION, AND PETITION*.

First let's talk about *ADORATION*, a very important part of our prayer life, often called worship. Praise God for His: goodness, patience, love, wisdom, power, greatness, holiness, glory, grace, peace, and so on. (Heb 13:15; Pslm 34:1-3), by way of singing (Pslm 47:6; 92:1,2), dancing (Pslm 149:3), lifting holy hands (Pslm 63:4, 134:2), musical instruments (Pslm 81:1-3; 150), and rejoicing. Praising God is truly an art form few of use except in church. Scriptures abound about praising God, rejoicing over what He has done. We often spend more time on other ways of communication; the GIMME part.

Through the help of the Holy Spirit, ask for His help in everything. Yield your entire life, your body, your being to God. Establish the Holy Spirit as your constant companion, the Breath of God. In humble prayer without ceasing ask the Holy Spirit to help you, Jesus promised you the Holy Spirit would help you when you needed help.

The second type is *CONFESSION*, or repentance, (Psalm 66:18; John 1:9). Prayerfully tell God, your Father, in your own words you are sorry for what you did and are not worthy to speak to Him except through His saving Grace and Jesus Christ.

STAND ON HIS WORD; Jesus is the same today as He was yesterday. He said no matter how we transgressed, if we repent and believe in Him we will be heard by God. Name whatever transgressions you might have committed, and be forgiven

The third type prayer is *THANKSGIVING* (Philpns 4:6; 1 Thes 5:18), thank God for your many blessings: material, physical, spiritual, people, grace, guidance, wealth, family, job, community, church, house, answer to prayers, etc.

Fourth is **INTERCESSION** sometimes called Supplication, (James 5:14-20; 1 Tim 2:1). Many times we place our prayer life in an “EMERGENCY ONLY” case releasing great amounts only when we find ourselves surrounded by the fires of life. This is the type prayer we use to pray for others. Visualize them healed, saved.

The Fifth type is **PETITION** (Heb 4:15,16; Jhn 15:7). This is sometimes called the GIMME prayer, for we often turn it into such instead of what it should be. Lift up your plans, hopes, directions, needs, problems, and pains. Climb into His lap, ask for a vision for your life. Pray for or about any new or specific tasks He might have for you. Tell Him what you feel. That you are stepping out in faith believing that you heard from Him. Ask Him to correct your steps, knowing this will sometimes require Him to break new ground in your life. Rest assured He will work your roots tenderly. Overcome fear, tell Him you need Him to intervene. Ask for courage that you may conquer and claim victory.

Too often WE WANT GOD TO SAY: first do this, then do that, and if you do then this will happen. God is never very willing to give us explicit directions, though He might. Once I sought God's voice, he answered, but I wanted other answers than what He gave. As I said before, the requirement is TO PUT GOD FIRST IN EVERYTHING IN YOUR LIFE EVERYTHING ELSE WILL FALL INTO PLACE. Try it, it's God's promise; this is not from some false god or modern new age guru.

ASK HIM FOR YOUR NEEDS, not greeds. Submerge yourself in His presence, accept His loving compassion. LIKE JOHN JOHN KENEDY IF YOU NEED TO, CRY!

(TAKE THE FIRST **FOUR STEPS** TOWARD INNER HEALING).

I. **REVIEW YOUR PROBLEMS**, describing what the enemy has done, what hurts, what brought you down. FREE YOURSELF FROM BURDEN Whether job, family, husband, wife, children, finances, or otherwise tell your Father.

Remember God already knows what's wrong, through the Holy Spirit (who searches all things, even the depths of God)..it is you who need to talk about it.. not Him.

II. **TELL HIM ABOUT YOUR BITTERNESS**, DO NOT JUSTIFY THEM. If vengeance is needed God will handle it, if you try YOU might be damaged.

III. **CONFESS YOUR INABILITY TO STAND ALONE**. Tell Him of your need for Him, of your trials, that you need His strength, that you can't make it without Him.

IV. **ASK FOR HIS HELP, FOR HIS PROTECTION**, for Him to intervene. He wants our permission, especially if it is an area you have previously claimed, “HELP ME LORD.” is a key for you, not Him. He can make rocks sing, however He wants you to choose the way to TRUE LIFE.

REMEMBER WHO YOU ARE when you leave God's Court (your prayer time, or inner closet), feed on His manna, the word of God. You are a child of God, a fellow heir to the Kingdom, ACT LIKE IT! You will not be defeated. GOD WILL NOT BE MOCKED.

MAKE PRAYER THE FIRST THING ON YOUR LIST for the day and devote yourself to communicating with Him all day long.

Col 4:12 “Devote yourselves to prayer, keeping alert in it with an attitude of thanksgiving.” Meaning to persevere in a constant mind set of prayer. At all times keeping the Father in your CONSCIOUS DECISION MAKING.

PRAYER IS THE PURIFICATION PROCESS OF YOUR WALK IN THE CHRISTIAN LIFE, and God is not finished with you yet. There are no shortcuts nor substitutes when it comes to communication with your Lord. Try to pray with a definite purpose otherwise you will soon end up using mundane trivia or babble risking losing a blessing. SAVOR IT, YOUR PRAYER LIFE, writing your prayers in a journal recording your walk with Him as He takes you on the journey of you life.

LET'S CLOSE WITH A PRAYER: Oh Lord God, in the name of the strong Deliverer, our only Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, lead us to that higher rock, for we are sometimes fearful of the things we face. As you did with Moses and the Israelites, Lord God, part the waters of our frustrations, the roots of our temptations and stress. Allow us and our people to pass through on dry land, unhindered by worldly deeds, forgiven, releasing the flood after our Passover, destroying such hindrances and frustrations that we confess openly to you, gently remind us of the burdens we keep in secret, until we are finally capable of eager service to you in all things. AMEN

And, please remember: What is said inside the groups, stays inside the groups.

Christianity For Today Session Three

PRAY: Lord God, we want to believe, help our unbelief. Help us see as you see and do as you do, not only to and for ourselves but for our fellow strugglers in life. Help us to be a better person when it comes to having patience as we know you have patience with us. Amen

Everybody Sing: God Will Make a Way

Does God Really Hear Me and Why? I wish I could give you a great and grand method or formula for hearing God, but I can't. I too have difficulty in knowing for sure. Oh sure I can receive a revelation through God's word, and most often, teachings and writings from God. I'm not complaining mind you. It's the part about hearing God as to His Will about something, like a new job, or the course you should travel when on a perilous journey or how to chose which job to accept.

God's word teaches us that everything we do that is not done in faith is in fact done in sin. That's where I have trouble. *I fear I'm in there leading instead listening to God.* Do you know what I mean?

The better question might be how do you hear God? I recently read you must, diverse or empty yourself from the world and its influences before you can hear God properly. I've done that and received things that seem to come from God, but how do I know they are truly from God? Sure you can test them, but if you are in the right ball park, in your life, aren't you liable to put your two cents in instead of letting God have His way?

Scripture says seek and you shall find, knock and it will be opened to you. The word seek means to go and search, to take great pains to find, to strive for. I've often done that and I'm sure you have too. I've even said I'm staying right here until I hear from You God. However, sometimes God has spoken previously, giving His leading but we have ignored Him. We in our ignorance must not remain tied to the dock unless God so demands it of us. Instead we must move out in faith after asking God for an answer, relying on God to direct us along the way. This is true, even if we find ourself upon the rocks, we must learn to have faith that God put us there.

The number one ingredient to hearing God or knowing His will for our life is always going to be prayer. We spoke about this last week and need to touch on it this week because of its importance. In your prayer life especially, open your heart to the Holy Spirit, allow Him to be your helper. *Jesus promised Holy Spirit would be!*

Eliminate the day to day distractions during your prayer time if you are seriously asking. Get rid of music, clocks ticking, what ever distracts you. Turn the lights off if need be. If you are okay with it all then leave them alone.

Don't pray on the fly about the things where you are truly seeking God's will. Don't be impatient with hearing, God has had patience with you. Whenever you pray, go to your room, close the door, and pray in private. Don't allow Satan to intervene, demand in the name of Jesus that Satan and his detractions be gone from your room.

Allow for silence, take your Bible and paper to write on. Be still, become the child, *trusting completely, be conscious of who you are waiting for, God is the supreme power of the universe, your Father, Your friend.*

Let Him in your room, invite Him. Tell Him how important He is and what He has to say about the subject you are asking. After having asked for His presence, know that He is there with you.

Let the Holy Spirit possess you and your thoughts. Become aware of the gifts given to you at Baptism: Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord; these are just a few of the gifts we'll go into more on that later on as we progress. Become dependent on them no matter where you are, especially in prayer.

Wisdom enables us to know how to use the gifts. *Understanding* enlightens us, removes confusion. *Counsel* enables us to know how to listen and act on His prompting. *Fortitude* gives us discipline, strength, and faith to do what we must. *Knowledge* allows us to see as God sees. *Piety* helps us to learn to love being in the presence of God. *Fear of the Lord* enables us to love the Lord so much that we fear not doing His will, doing our's instead.

Hearing God is one of the most important things we can do as Christians. Jesus promises, we will, so we must train ourselves.

I remember reading about a man who heard God say stop! He pulled over to the side of the road. Afterward he came to a terrible wreck. There were many deaths. The man asked God why didn't He stop them too. God answered him, saying He had, they didn't listen.

I have heard of many instances where things like this have happened, and I'm sure we could all say the same thing about instances when we have truly heard God. *It is said that Feeling is the voice of the body, while Reason is the voice of the soul or mind, and Conscience is the voice of the spirit.*

John 16:13,14 Jesus says, "***When He, the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth; for He will not speak on His own initiative, but whatever He hears, He will speak; and He will disclose to you what is to come. He shall glorify me; for He shall take of Mine and shall disclose it to you.***"

How do we hear God? Only you and God know the answer to that question. *But if you do not listen, how will you ever hear?*

There are *Four Christian keys that can help us hear God and allow Him to direct our lives in a more disciplined Christian way, helping us to obtain a Godly successful living.* 1) God has a plan that includes our best interests at heart! And that we should, 2) Put God first in everything we do! Establishing the Holy Spirit as our constant companion, 3) Yielding to God through the Holy Spirit and Christ, persevering in faith always! And then simply learning to, 4) "Follow Christ, sharing the good news in love to all God places before you!"

I often harp on knowing the character of God, and having faith in His ways no matter what happens. *Sometimes that is our only solitude, knowing that God knows more than we do, knowing His ways, His will, His ways will always be worked out.*

Asking why does God allow bad things to happen is like asking why God doesn't just make us do the right thing at the right time. *It's a sure bet that between Satan and us we have messed up God's creation immensely.* That is not to say, we have messed up God's plan or the prophesied happenings for the future, nor the outcome, that will never happen. God's plan, *and its purposes will be worked out, no matter whether we plead or beg, it will happen.* *The end of what we know or see will come.* We in our most infinitive wisdom, like that of Peter's or anybody else's will not change it.

In the meantime, through all our travails *we can have life abundantly here on earth* That is not to say, everything will be perfect. *We all must suffer certain circumstances, some more than others.* Some will be given more to deal with than others in both blessings and difficult ways.

***What is the purpose of life,** this is difficult to answer.* Nonetheless, we have been asking ourselves that question for thousands of years. The truth is we do not have to understand all things, we only have to have faith that God does!

Does God Really Have a Plan For My Life? Have you ever looked and listened to God's creation? The sounds of it? The wind blowing through the trees! A leaf falling to the soil has a sound and serves to feed the whole creation. The myriads of birds singing plant seeds for the forest. Life is beautiful and we are blessed beyond measure!

"But, what about the fact I don't hear God telling me every turn I ought to make," you say? "What about all the trouble I see?"

How often you have prayed, Oh God show me the way and I will do it! Abraham started out not knowing which way to go. Only that he should go, for God commanded it!

Did you ever wonder how often He might have shown us if we would have only taken the first step? If you were a boat, a sleek beautiful boat, designed and crafted by the best hand, by the master builder of boats, how well would you ply the seas if you remained tied to the dock? We are often like that boat saying, "Oh Lord if I only knew your will for me in my life I would truly sail the seas."

If you can't muster up enough courage to take the first step, pushing away from the dock and heading out of the port how will you serve the master builder?

God has a plan; but you must take the *first step!* He has a plan from beginning to end! But, *does it include us? You bet it does! You are God's accepted child!* He has known you from the time you were formed in your mother's womb! Just as he has known the foundations of the creation, He has known you!

Jeremiah 1:5-10, *"I knew you before I formed you in your mother's womb. Before you were born I set you apart and appointed you as my spokesman to the world. O Sovereign Lord," I said, "I can't speak for you! I'm too young!" "Don't say that," the Lord replied, "for you must go wherever I send you and say whatever I tell you. And don't be afraid of the people, for I will be with you and will take care of you. I, the Lord, have spoken!" Then the Lord touched my mouth and said, "See, I have put My words in your mouth! Today I appoint you to stand up against nations and kingdoms. You are to uproot some and tear them down, to destroy and overthrow them. You are to build others up and plant them."*

Can you fully grasp it? He has been telling us this for years. He will not be mocked! Will He then fail to guide us? Of course not; He promises to care!

Luke 12:27-32: *"Look at the lilies and how they grow. They don't work or make their clothing, yet Solomon in all his glory was not dressed as beautifully as they are. And if God cares so wonderfully for flowers that are here today and gone tomorrow, won't he more surely care for you? You have so little faith! And don't worry about food—what to eat and drink. Don't worry whether God will provide it for you. These things dominate the thoughts of most people, but your Father already knows your needs. He will give you all you need from day to day if you make the Kingdom of God your primary concern. "So don't be afraid, little flock. For it gives your Father great happiness to give you the Kingdom."*

Look around you. If he cares for the small things how much more will He care about you? And, your needs! But we say, God I need You to lead me, to show me each step for I am afraid!

If God knows all things, then isn't it true we only need to have faith in Him to follow? When God sent Jesus to the disciples do you think Jesus had to give a series of hard teachings before they were willing to follow Him? No of course not, they were given by God a level of faith with which to respond to Him, we are given that or a similar level.

However, we want God to respond to our every whim don't we? *We act as though we expect God's guidance to direct us so we will know and not have to have faith in what we do, only blindly follow God!*

Is that really what we want? Of course not! Can we say to the eagle to fly or to fall? No! What in fact gives an eagle flight? If you can accept it, it is faith! He sees in his parents what God has intended of him, to fly! But, he is afraid! Aren't we too afraid to fly as God intended! Psalm 32:8-9. ***The Lord says, "I will guide you along the best pathway for your life. I will advise you and watch over you. Do not be like a senseless horse or mule that needs a bit and bridle to keep it under control."***

Read and inwardly digest God's word. And fellowship with Him through earnest prayer, asking with the right motives -- honestly seek God's kingdom first. *This is your most important thing in life.* All things lie at the mercy of this. *For without this action you place a wedge between yourself and God.*

Jeremiah 17:5-8: ***This is what the Lord says: "Cursed are those who put their trust in mere humans and turn their hearts away from the Lord. They are like stunted shrubs in the desert, with no hope for the future. They will live in the barren wilderness, on the salty flats where no one lives. But blessed are those who trust in the Lord and have made the Lord their hope and confidence. They are like trees planted along a riverbank, with roots that reach deep into the water. Such trees are not bothered by the heat or worried by long months of drought. Their leaves stay green, and they go right on producing delicious fruit."***

Do you hear what He is saying -- Seek ye first the kingdom of God. That is the water He is speaking of. If we establish the practice of placing our hearts in God's hand before we place our feet on the floor we will be well grounded near the stream of life. The living waters of God! It is God's responsibility to show us the way to go once we set our sails according to Him.

HOW DOES GOD GUIDE US!?? God promises to guide us; His will is found easiest in His word, please read it daily. it gives us clear guidelines as to how He wants us to live. John 10:3,4: ***"He calls His own sheep by name, His sheep follow Him because they know his voice."*** Jeremiah 29:11: ***"I have good plans for you, not plans to hurt you. I will give you hope and a good future."***

When faced with major decisions we need to find out what God's particular will is. Allow Holy Spirit to help you, that is His job. God speaks to us when we pray. If it is a major situation, seek out mature Christians for help, avoiding simply circumstances and feelings instead walking in faith. Learn His voice. Trust God, but test your feelings. Your feelings can lead you astray. Learn to trust and depend on Him and He will take care of you.

Truly, by seeking God's will, asking Him to intervene on your behalf, and through prayer and scripture reading, God will guide you continually, it is His job, and He is in control. Remember, God's guidance will not take you into areas that contradict the scriptures, and do not take an isolated statement and use it as a direction, but look at the whole context, the chapters before and after, therein you'll find the truth. Satan also knows how to quote scripture and He will try to get you confused by twisting God's word into something it is not. Therefore learn the Character of God.

Where are we, where we are going? Where are we *supposed* to be going? What are we *supposed to do* when we get there? We must make decisions in life; about relationships, marriage, children, use of time, jobs, homes, money, holidays, possessions, our giving, they all are *very big things in our life*. It is important that we come to the right conclusion. Sometimes we make plans that seem to be God's will, *plunging headlong without asking God. It seemed right at the time*, now we're not sure what He will say. So we ask Him to bless it but we have the wrong order of things.

Do not let your disobedience separate you from YOUR God. Like it says in Psalm 25:14, God confides in those who fear Him. We need that attitude of humility and fear. *Yet, Not the fear you run from, the fear you run to.* the power that stands between the very molecules of the air we breathe and the ones that holds a block of wood and that of our own body together. *That's the power we can now abide in.*

Yet to me, *it's not the fear of such awesome power, but, the fear of losing His presence in my life, that covering amidst the storms of life,* those blessings that bring *peace that passes understanding.*

I have a little tattered New Testament, it has been with me in many serious and joyful times, hunting, in my garden, in foreign nations, on the ocean, in aircraft of many sizes. It has been sopping wet from the rain and the sweat of hard labor. Through it all it gave me what I sought, God's living word.

How do we know the will of God and how does He guide us? As I have been attempting to show you, God's general will is revealed in scripture, the Bible discloses the truth. *Some try to bend it.* But, Jesus Christ is the living Word, and He is a strong and unbendable truth. God will not lead us to anything contrary to scripture. Do not ask what He already answered. From the scriptures we know full well certain things are against God's will. THE KEY WORD IS TO TRUST GOD. IN ALL THINGS! *Get GOD involved!!* Unless you trust God, He may leave you to your own devices!!!

He will not allow you to walk away from areas you need to deal with until you do, deal with it. Do not depend on letting the Bible fall open, hoping to find answers. While it often works, *let His guidance come from a regular and methodical Bible study and prayer life.* God will show you scriptures that leap from the pages, *the first true steps in gaining wisdom and understanding. and to that of hearing God's voice.*

We most often think of Moses when we think of God guiding someone. Can you imagine what it was like to be Moses? Several times he asked God to put him out of his misery. *Who could blame him? Imagine that many people complaining.* He spent *forty years with the pestering bunch, wandering around in the desert, eating nothing but bread off the ground and an occasional bird.* What a change for the Jewish diet. And on top of that, *every day a million people would come up to him and ask "Are we there yet?"*

But, we have even more than the Israelites had. When Jesus left He sent a compelling Holy Spirit to help guide us. In John 10 and Acts 16, Jesus tells us His sheep know His voice and He will lead them. That's us folks.

God most often guides us when we pray. *Ask God to speak to you.* It is mysterious indeed, *to hear God speak.* Some claim He will not, others claim He speaks a in loud audible voice. Mostly God's voice is *perceived.* When He answers you, share it. Never hide your blessings. *After a while you too will know His voice.* If you profess to be His, He *will* guide you. Still, even if you don't yet know His voice, the Holy Spirit does and He is your helper.

Sometimes I too am perplexed, I hear nothing, *or, His voice in me is easily drowned out by my own reasoning.* That's the way God made us, *allowing our will to overrule His.* Sometimes the answer comes through a good thought, a strong impression or feelings; *but they all need tested.* Does the answer bear fruit, is it found in love? Does it bring strength to your soul and to those around you. Does it encourage and comfort you? Does it edify you and your church? Does it bring the peace of God that surpasses all else?

God often gives us a strong desire to do something, working on your will to act according to His purposes. *This can be an imagined fear* for many. Did you know that fear is the antitheses of faith, it keeps you from turning your life completely over to Christ. "Next thing y'a know I'll be a *missionary in darkest Africa,*" they say. They think of a worst idea and assume God will send them there. It's not likely to happen, though if it has been in *your heart* it might.

Don't misinterpret butterflies in your tummy as a lack of God's peace (*or, fear*). Sometimes Holy Spirit gives us a Holy excitement when we are about to testify or do works He called us to do. Test it out with scripture, you will find peace in your heart.

When you seek guidance, listen for God's side. Don't be like some *people so adamant about following God that they very rarely make decisions.* God's promises for guidance were not given to stop us from thinking; *nor reading His word* concerning countless daily issues. We should relinquish our human attitudes. *not our minds.*

His guidance is personal. When we open up to His Spirit He communicates in our understanding. If you are confused, *Counsel with the saints!* Ask someone who knows the Bible better than you, someone impartial who has your best interest at heart.

Yet the decision is ultimately between you and God

James 3:17 says: ***"The wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering without hypocrisy, and the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace."***

God often uses circumstances; but be careful here, not putting too much weight in them. Misguided prayers are fraught with that of asking God to open and close doors. While this sometimes works, and maybe more often than not; it in itself is dangerous and can lead you straight to sin.

Do not accept an open door as being His direction because it's open; sometimes we need to persevere in spite of the circumstances, developing the strength to force a door open in faith. *Sometimes doors opening too easily are temptations rather than opportunities.*

Be wary, the adversary prowls about like a lion seeking those to destroy. God knows your whole person, Satan doesn't but he sure knows your flesh, and *can open doors and can shut them.* **Another big key:** *Genuinely knowing God's character through a personal relationship is how we truly know what God wants in our life.*

What's it like being out of God's will? ***Deuteronomy 28:65-67 "You shall find no ease and there shall be no rest for the sole of your foot; the lord will give you a trembling heart, failing eyes, fainting of mind and languishing of spirit. Your life shall hang in doubt before you day and night, you shall worry and have no assurance of your life. In the morning you shall say, would it be evening! In the evening you shall say, would it be morning! Because of the anxiety and dread of your mind, heart, and sights which you see with your eyes."***

Many have learned the pain of being out of God's will so well they cease to recognize it, establishing fear as the dominant force in their life.

So, our job is to do four things., ***First***, submit to Him and refuse to follow human desires. ***Second***, allow God to intervene. ***Third***, say is it me, *am I overriding Holy Spirit again? Is it merely my flesh?* ***Fourth***, say *What Would Jesus do?* Many times that takes care of the question.

God mysteriously works in many ways, hence we must learn the *voice, not the way it comes*.

Let us pray: Be with us oh Lord, that we may become more as we should be, teach us, speak to us, encourage us and help us, especially as we seek answers to the questions that plague our hearts, help us to have patience with each other as you have had patience with us. Amen

And please remember: What is said inside stays inside.

Christianity For Today Session Four

PRAY: Lord God you promise that you know every hair on our head, help us to yield ourselves to You and Your guidance. Speak to us, we yearn to hear Your voice that we may do Your bidding. Help us to have patience with ourselves and others as you have patience with us. Show us new and hidden meanings for our life that we may become truly what you have called us to be. Amen

Everybody Sing: God Will Make a Way

As we previously said: God has a purpose for you, and He knew you even before you were born. Along with that He placed that seed of yearning for Him that you have inside, He also placed a seed of faith, and also a knowledge of His grace, and when those seeds grow, your hearing of the word changes as it comes near to you, and now hopefully you find you have the gift of understanding, without it you would not believe.

Blessed are those who believe, for they shall know the Kingdom of God, and that brings us to the greatest gift of all, Salvation from God, Salvation comes only in the name of Jesus the Christ, What a great gift. In John 11:25, Jesus says, ***“I am the resurrection and the life, He who believes in me will live, even though he dies, and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”***

He asks us all the same question, ***DO YOU BELIEVE?*** Do you believe Jesus Christ is the son of God? Do you believe He died for your sins??? He believes in you. He wants to give you gifts. Each one of you are alive for a purpose. God brought you here.. the Kingdom of God has come near you, and He has given you the gift of understanding, or you would not stay. Please cherish this gift, and help others to understand, it is your calling.

Who or What Is the Holy Spirit? Holy Spirit is not a Ghost. He is a person. Scripture tells us He thinks, speaks, leads, and is grieved. He is also described as, Spirit of Christ, Spirit of Jesus, or in effect Jesus' other self. He is often called the paraclete, one called alongside, counselor, comforter, encourager; or, to put it another way He is just like Jesus. A paraclete incidently is the name also given to the device driven into the rock of a mountain so climber can have a safe climb. Holy Spirit is eternal, we see evidence of His existence in the opening pages of scripture, Genesis 1:1,2. The ***“Spirit of God hovered over the waters.”*** God's breath gave man life. ***“He formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils, man then became a living being.”*** The Hebrew word, Ruach, means breath of God, or Spirit of God. God breathed His Spirit into Adam. Adam was the first man to be filled with the Spirit. Nevertheless, as we can plainly see from the history of Adam, being filled with the Spirit did not take away his will. Turning our will over to God, Jesus Christ and Holy Spirit takes a life long commitment which is never complete until we are finally changed into what we were originally created for. When God is finished with us and we are wrapped up in eternal life we will be a spirit fully equipped to do good work which He will require of us. Until then we must struggle with our mortal bodies doing the best we can with what we are presently equipped with.

In the Old Testament Holy Spirit was brought creativity alive in certain individuals, (Exodus 31:2-5). Yes, it is definitely possible to be creative without having the anointing of Holy Spirit; yet, any creative person will tell you when filled with the Spirit their work takes on an entirely deeper quality with new and greater dimension. How many artists or creative people died seeking that same level of creativity through drugs, alcohol and other depraved worldly indifference? With God it is simply a gift for the asking. However, you still must practice.

The Spirit fell on many people in the old testament for specific purposes. He does so today, but even more so to those who believe that God sent His only Son to die on the cross for our sins and who accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. In doing so Holy Spirit breathes new life into them, the same way today as He did in the old Testament. Just as He set Samson free from the bindings that held him prisoner, that he might do God's work of destroying the Philistines, He also will break us free from the bindings of sin and addiction, if we will let Him.

Before I gave my life to Christ, I often felt hopeless, lost and confused when confronted with the difficult things of life. I wondered what it was all about, thinking everything was pointless and how my life was useless. Through Christ's teaching and Holy Spirit's guidance I see things differently now. I have much to give. Things, though they are often difficult, are much clearer now.

Yes bad things still happen to good people; but, the Spirit of God indeed gives us the way to bind up the brokenness of those who suffer, including ourselves. If we expect to help people, in such a way as leading them to eternity, we can only do so *effectively* in and through Holy Spirit's guidance.

If we try on our own, we may make a difference; but, with Him the difference is eternity. Actually did you know your eternal life with God really begins when you accept Christ as your Lord and Savior. It's a promise from God, we shall never die but be changed, sort of like a caterpillar becomes a butterfly.

Jeremiah 31:33 tells us one of God's promises, ***"I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts."*** The old Testament is full of God's promises and His love, yet it is also full of man's attempt at making his own way by legalism, instead of following God's ways. The New Testament, or New Covenant writings, shows God's compassion and mercy, giving us His ways written in our hearts, through Holy Spirit. Like carrying food on your back for a long journey, as you consume it, your burden becomes lighter and you gain new strength. So too is the way in which God's Word leads us on and we find strength untold.

Now through Christ's great sacrifice, we are able to receive Holy Spirit and His many blessing and Gifts. With such spiritual gifts we can do all things. It says in Joel 2:28,29 ***"I will pour out My Spirit on all people, your sons will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out My Spirit in those days."***

Jesus was completely filled with the Spirit and promises the same for us today. He is the same today as He was yesterday. No matter what you have done or said, all you need to do is repent, which means turn around from the direction you were going and follow Me, accepting that Jesus was who He said He was, the Son of God, and that He died for your sins, asking for His forgiveness; when you do that you will receive His forgiveness and be changed forever.

What Does Holy Spirit Do? In the Old Testament, Holy Spirit anointed and fell on various individuals. Moses expressed his wish (Nu. 11:29) that the Spirit would fall on ALL God's people. Isaiah 11:2 ***"And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of***

WISDOM and UNDERSTANDING, the spirit of COUNSEL and might, the spirit of KNOWLEDGE and of the FEAR OF THE LORD;” Here we see six gifts are prophesied for Christ. Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Might, Knowledge, and Fear of the Lord. Great attributes for a leader, RIGHT? Don't we wish our leaders were that well equipped? Pray for them that they may become filed!

Again in Isaiah 11 verse 3-5 we find out how the gifts might effect us, producing spiritual fruits. Christ died, was resurrected and returned to the right hand of God for many reasons, one being to fulfill a promise that requires that we receive two supreme gifts, Salvation and His Holy Spirit. Our salvation brings to us the GIFT of Eternal Life. Holy Spirit bestows or imparts upon us PART OF HIMSELF, HIS ABILITIES, AND HIS MINISTRIES in the form of spiritual gifts just as He wills. However, some will get more than others.

Yeah, you say, the old adage “Them that's got, get” applies.

This is true, but in the same manner of the parable of the talents more is given to those who prove themselves to God. Yet, God never makes anyone greater or lessor in His eyes and your cup will forever be overflowing with blessings from God.

SPIRITUAL GIFTS ARE GOD'S PERFECT ORDER. Spiritual gifts are *not* the same as natural God-given gifts, intelligence and judgements, those natural talents or abilities that help us do whatever it is that we have learned to do, as they say in the “natural.” We are wrong if we believe our natural gifts AUTOMATICALLY become our spiritual gifts. **THEY MAY IN FACT BECOME ENHANCED,** developed, or blessed in wonderful ways because of our new relationship with Christ, **YET** God has a purpose we cannot necessarily see and our natural talents may not play a significant part in what we are to be about.

So, God, through Holy Spirit, adds His unique, Devine gifts to us all, in the ways that He knows is right and true, that we might accomplish His purposes, NOT OURS. in the order and quantity he sees fit. Consequently, we do not own a Spiritual Gift or earn them, lest we be proud, they are the property of Holy Spirit, to give in the way He sees fit, for the purposes of God.

However always desire more of His Gifts. Like a well used sponge or scrubbing cloth needs re-wetted again and again after continual use. We too can become hardhearted and abrasive to others without re-submitting ourselves to God. Seek after the gifts, **receive your full inheritance.** Paul reminded Timothy (IITim 1:6-18) to rekindle his gift.

We all are given these endowments but they must be used or they wither and die. By exercising our gifts, they grow strong. It's called walking in faith. He give us a full complement of **ALL HIS GIFTS.** Some gifts, however, are only evident when He wants to use them in us. Some are strongly evident, to be used powerfully in the Church. Others receive quiet gifts for ministries seldom seen. Yet to each of us we are given the potential to do great things.

When confronted with a task seemingly too great, the gift lying dormant is made evident, and we are used in a mighty way. There are many gifts but we will talk about the seven sometimes called, **MOTIVATIONAL GIFTS,** listed in Romans CH 12: PROPHECY, MINISTRY, TEACHING, EXHORTING (OR AN ENCOURAGER), CONTRIBUTOR TO NEEDS (OR A GIVER), LEADERSHIP, AND THAT OF MERCY. These are given that you may serve others. **IN-OTHER-WORDS, HE BLESSES US THAT WE MAY BLESS OTHERS. I recommend you to read, study and inwardly digest all of Romans chapters 12,13,14,& 15.** They explain our calling as a Christian.

Does Holy Spirit motivate you when you are confronted with a situation that requires one or more of these gifts, and you step out in faith and obedience? Are you led to minister spiritually. When doing so do you immediately speak the truth, providing the action that comes

from His mercy. Do you stay close to the Lord in your time of ministry, obeying Him in your responses? If so you have been **MOTIVATED**, and are exercising **SPIRITUAL GIFTS**.

In Romans 12 verse 9-21, we see the effects of the gifts, **FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT**. If you do not have fruits, you do not have the gifts. **Ephesians 4:11-12** lists five more gifts, often called **GIFTS TO THE WHOLE CHURCH. APOSTLES, PROPHETS, EVANGELISTS, PASTORS, AND TEACHERS**. These are primary areas of ministry in the church. If you attempt to force such gifts within yourself, you might become like an apple tree straining to produce a watermelon. Yet, if Holy Spirit leads you, you are assured success in His eyes, that's what counts. Man's ideas of success often strongly disagree with God's. If we attempt to minister according to our flesh, or natural gifts, we can never be sure whether we are in fact producing fruit that places treasures in heaven, or spoils or rotten fruit from the flesh. Only through seeking Christ's ways and following Holy Spirit's leading can we completely please God.

WHY DO WE EVEN HAVE SUCH GIFTS? I found as many as 10 different reasons spelled out in the scriptures: **(1)** For the equipping or perfecting the Saints (us too), **(2)** For the common good, or work of the ministry, **(3)** For the encouragement or edification of the body of Christ. **(4)** For unity in the faith. **(5)** For the sure knowledge of the Son of God. **(6)** That the Kingdom of God may be advanced, bringing as many as are willing **(7)** That we not be carried about with every wind of change, or by the cunningness and craftiness of man. **(8)** That we may speak the truth in love. **(9)** That we may grow into His likeness And **(10)** To glorify God.

No spiritual gift should point to or edify the one who manifests or has or displays the gift, BUT TO GOD. We must treat *these Gifts* as pearls of great price; cherish them as does any good servant, realizing many people depend on our use of them.

Jesus told his disciples to be filled with the power from on high: (Matt. 28:19; Mk. 16:17-18; Lk. 24:47; Acts 1:8) That they might evangelize, Baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; cast out demons; heal the sick; speak with new tongues. These are manifestations **OF THE HOLY SPIRIT'S MINISTRY**.

If we possessed all the brilliance or strength in the world and do not live lovingly, we will be nothing at all. In 1 Corinthians 14 we are told to desire spiritual *gifts*. **But be careful not to seek things of Spirit for the wrong motives, settling instead for things which confuse and disrupt the church.** God does not author confusion, but peace.

There is a third group of gifts sometimes called the **Specific Circumstances Gifts**. *1 Corinthians chapter 12:1* names: **WISDOM, KNOWLEDGE, FAITH, HEALING, MIRACULOUS POWERS, PROPHECY, DISTINGUISHING BETWEEN SPIRITS, SPEAKING IN DIFFERENT KINDS OF TONGUES, AND THE INTERPRETATION OF TONGUES**. All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and He gives them to each one, just as He determines.

Let's talk about distinguishing between spirits or discernment. This is of the utmost importance in spiritual warfare and in our daily walk. Read James 3:17,18; John 16:13; and 1 Corinthians 2:11-16. In John 10 & Acts 16 Jesus tell us how His sheep will know His voice. We must be careful. Discerning whether you or someone else has a spiritual gift can sometimes be difficult. Read 1 John 4:1-6, it gives us concrete areas to examine concerning discernment. Also examine: does what they, or you, say and do, bear fruit? In love, do they bring strength to your soul and others? Do they encourage, edify and bring peace to the body? We must never boast of the gifts He gives us. They are awesome indeed, but not ours and only to be used by Him *when He uses us*.

DOES GOD REALLY HEAL TODAY? When you see or hear of God healing someone miraculously, you are getting a small glimpse of what it is to be like in heaven when *the final redemption* of our bodies take place, it's exciting to think about, no more suffering or pain.

For some of us that is a biggie, right?

Each person I suppose could tell a story about a person *who was healed*. Sometimes they are instantaneous, *however, sometimes we are not privileged to see it in our life*. That's a cop out some say. God only heals who He will and that's the end of it.

Read Roman 8:22,23, and 1 Corinthians 15:50-54 In our early walk, and sometimes even now if we admit it, we doubt God concerning prayers to heal. Not that we necessarily doubt His ability; but maybe the one we are praying for; or our own sinful nature; or **something in the past, maybe causing a blockage.** *Anyway you look at it, it is doubt* that God will truly answer our prayers for any given thing. ***Rather than expecting a healing as we should, we are frequently taken by surprise*** when it happens as we prayed for it. We need to **firmly** get those words **implanted on our hearts, EXPECT A MIRACLE!**

Sometimes we catch ourselves almost intentionally avoiding a person that we know is sick or in need of healing. When we are face to face, we are fearful of asking, "You and I prayed for a healing in your life, *has God healed you?*" We want to know, *but we our flesh rises up in doubt.*

DOES GOD ACTUALLY HEAL TODAY? ***Most of you never heard of a friend of mine, Bill Lance.*** He was a veterinarian at Eglin, an elder when being an elder meant, being fully immersed in both ministry and community life. There were twelve such men including the priests. Bill contracted Leukemia, a very severe case. He was prayed for often, that God would heal him. The entire church came together several times, even asking one time for anyone who did not believe that God could heal Bill to leave, and some did.

Time after time he went to Biloxi for Chemotherapy treatments. He was often very weak, especially in the morning. The Air Force retired him on disability and a year and a half later, I think it was, he lay in bed in Biloxi, not expecting to live the night out. That night Bill was awakened by a sensation of high heat traveling throughout his body, moving as though it were the hand of God.

The next morning there was no trace of Leukemia. The Air Force doctors said he had merely gone into remission, nobody was cured from Leukemia, especially the bone type. Though Bill met with Air Force officials many times trying to change his disability retirement to regular retirement, they refused to accept that he was healed. He continues to this day to practice actively, as a world renown veterinarian, having developed a series of vaccinations for sheep from his studies in Colorado where he moved to when he left Destin several years after his healing.

Why does God heal some *and not others*, and why on his time table, not ours? We did all the right things for Bill, *yet he lay dying*. We continued to pray, but were sickened with anguish along with him. As I delve into the recesses of my mind, *I know we all have felt that same anguish*. Watching a loved one suffer is not easy. *Many fall away after such an experience;* but, have you ever thought about God's time verses our time.

I'm **not to good at math**, but a thousand years verses one of His years ***equates to a bunch of difference.*** **What couldn't you do with such time?** Count all the hairs on my head, listen to us all, heal us, and ***have plenty of time to run the universe.***

How much time do we exist in God's time? The time we have here on earth? I don't know, maybe you can figure it out, *maybe a couple of hours on His time.* *How long is our Christian life span?* There is no end? We will be able to see what is done in His time and our

time on earth, *our birth-pain years will be but a fleeting time then.* Yet, we are stuck here now. Right? *We must live it now.*

Should I expect God to heal today? In fact if I do not expect God to heal today, then I am saying to God, you don't care about my situation; I virtually can't depend on you."

If you are around me much, you will often hear me extol the value of learning God's character. If you know Him, *you know Jesus and Holy Spirit, and no one can draw you aside.*

The Greek word that means "I save" also means "I heal." To say "Jesus saves" is to say "*He heals!*" There in lies faith. In knowing who you are dealing with, and standing in faith that what He says is true, *He does not lie.*

In 2 Kings 5 we are told the story of Naaman the great warrior who had leprosy. *He raged with anger when Elisha sent word for him to wash in the Jordan River seven times.* It was not what Naaman expected and he would have gone away unhealed if not for the wise council of his trusted servants. *As he washed in obedience, against his better judgement, his skin became like that of a baby's.* We are not so different than Naaman. *We too, try to put God in a box, expecting Him to do as we want and on our own time schedule?*

Ajay Gohill, a young Hindu, born in Kenya, contracted erythrodermic psoriasis, a chronic skin disease that dropped his weight from 160 to 105 pounds. He was treated all over the world in major hospitals. After spending eighty percent of his family's wealth the only difference was that he had a liver disease from strong drugs. He was so horrible to look at he lost his wife and children. As he lay in hospital bed he wanted to die. Finally he cried out to a God he was not sure existed, saying, "*God if you are watching me let me die, I am sorry if I have done something wrong.*" He opened a Bible he found Psalm 38. Every verse leaped from the pages and he prayed for God to heal him, falling asleep. The next morning was different, he felt joyful, like a new man, even his body looked different. *He like Naaman took a bath.* Astounded he called for the nurses to come, his skin had lifted off in the water. *He told the nurses God was healing him.* When he emerged from the water he was like Naaman. He had skin like a baby. He was totally healed. Since then he has been reunited with his family, *but says the inner healing that took place was far greater than the physical healing.* Today, he lives as a servant, for Jesus.

Inner healing, if you feel condemnation, *look to where it is coming from.* Only Satan condemns; *Holy Spirit convicts; there is a big difference.* One brings the possibility of life and healing, that has no ending. *The other death and unholy shame, an eternal death that has no ending.*

I want to talk a little about the flesh here. Romans 8:6&7: ***"For the mind set on the flesh is death, but the mind set on the Spirit is life and peace. Because the mind set on the flesh is hostile toward God; for it does not subject itself to the Law of God, for it is NOT ABLE TO DO SO."*** You and I, as Christians, are aliens to the world, and prisoners in the flesh. *If you leave here with nothing more I want you to take this key with you.* Your flesh wants to hold your spirit captive; that is the part of our body that is sinful in nature. If you listen to your flesh as though it is telling you the truth, *you are being deceived.* *Satan is in charge of the flesh if you allow him to* and he is the deceiver you are listening to. *Lift up your shield of faith. Reject those fiery darts and recognize where they are coming from. They come from the power of darkness. The wrong side of the tracks within you.*

From Jesus' teachings in Mark 1:15 and many other places in the New Testament we know God's Kingdom, *the rule of God,* is not only for the future but is for here and now, where we are, and His character is involved wanting to heal our affirmatives, wanting us to succeed in what we are suppose to be about, *doing His will.*

Lets face it, God is in the normal business of healing. Essentially *twenty-five percent of the scriptures in the New Testament deal with the healings that Jesus did*; and, He commissioned His disciples to do the same. *Heal the sick and spread the Good News. First he commissioned the twelve*, then seventy and twelve, *and now us, each of you fall under the same commission*, if you have given yourself over to Christ, allowing Him to be the Lord and Savior of your life.

No where in the Bible does it say healing was confined to a particular time, *instead Jesus teaches us these are the signs of the coming of the Kingdom of God*. We should make it a regular expectation in our prayer life, *expecting miracles*, *not standing in wonderment when it happens*.

As a servant of God, duly commissioned, accept your position in faith, the position He died on the cross to save you for, bringing you in as adopted heirs into the Kingdom of God. If you have not given yourself over to Christ and want to ask someone to pray with you. If you have a particular need that you are burdened with do the same. Only do not go away with a need not met. Come fully into the Kingdom of God in a triumphant manner.

Now how do you pray for one another for it is your duty? Whether they are in front of you or thousands of miles away, *during your prayer ask God for a picture or a word concerning that person, what is needed for them*.

Ask the person, if possible, some of the same questions: 1.) What needs do they have. What is wrong. Why do they want prayers. 2.) What has caused this condition? 3.) How should I pray? 4.) After prayer, how do they feel now? Reassure them or continue to pray for them. 5.) Be persistent, advise them to do the same.

Now, let us pray. Lord God, our Father of Lord Jesus Christ we come to you joyfully accepting our place as servants of the most high, that we may do Your bidding here on earth, that others might be drawn into Your kingdom and not be lost. Help us oh Lord to have the heart of love for those who You place before us, that we may reflect Your love, given to us at great cost and pain. Help us Lord God to continue in fellowship and in worship with You that we might finally hear, "Well done good and faithful servant, go into the joy of your Master."

Amen

Christianity For Today Session Five

Let us pray: Lord God You have brought us thus far, help us to continue on your pathways. Help us oh God to seek the changes you desire in our lives that we may soon realize we are new creatures, born again, created anew with a clean heart, seeking Holiness instead of worldly gain. Amen

Everybody Sing: God Will Make a Way

How Can I Change? I read several months ago where someone famous used the expression, "Courage out of ignorance." It sounded good, like a real truism. Another one I heard concerning having children in the first place always seemed true, "It seemed like the right thing to do at the time." I've often thought about these statements, deciding I could place myself into both categories. *Maybe not such a good thing.*

People often wonder how I can do so many different things, well the truth is out, the reason is ignorance; I don't know any better than to try, and usually that's all God wants from us isn't it.

Well when you're driving the interstate highways like I used to do so often, you have long periods of time to think. I thought about myself and the above statements, and the ignorance of things. Now being ignorant is not often a very good thing. According to Webster, ignorant, means destitute of knowledge, comprehension, education, or simply uninformed. I decided that to ignore something was different than being ignorant, but according to Webster it isn't.

Let's look at Faith which is not ignorance. And we should never pretend the enemy or a problem doesn't exist, ignoring the problem, instead we must face it head on. Only victory, never ignorance makes us a winner. Conversely, courage out of ignorance is fake courage, and must be corrected by God. Yet, courage out of faith gives us truth and life.

Have you been denying problems, ignoring them, putting them aside, believing them conquered? Jesus taught how merely thinking of a sinful act was as guilty as performing it. We say how can that be, if I deny my sinful nature, at least I'm not doing it? Nevertheless, the problem lies below the surface, waiting to pounce when the time comes. For you see you have gained no victory if you simply deny the problem exists? Suddenly this makes me realize that many things I thought I had overcome are simply denied. I have ignored problems in order to live normally. Now God wants me to face such situations head on, thereby walking out my salvation.

Proverbs 10:17 ***"He who heeds discipline shows the way to life, but whoever ignores correction leads others astray."***

How do you face the old garbage, the things you thought you defeated many years ago? I don't know for sure, but I can assure you I will not stand ignorant of them anymore. I will spend more time with positive thoughts and stand, as best I can, in a courage out of faith not ignorance.

Sometimes we say, "I've lost hope." What we are really saying is we are striving in our will not God's will. To learn to do God's will you must start by choosing and accepting Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, then by allowing His Holy Spirit to help you will find out what or where your place is!

You noticed I said allow Holy Spirit to help! He will not make you do it, no more than God Himself made His people blow their horns against Jericho in the Old Testament or for Jesus to die on the cross! He wants free will from His people, not robots

What or where is your place in the vineyards? It is up to you and God! You can chose the wrong place, or the right place it's up to you. Do not be deceived into thinking another can tell you which way you should go, you must seek God's direction for yourself to really know what He desires for or of you. Oh sure you can ask someone, and you probably should, hopefully you would ask a trusted and mature Christian, to intercede for you and help you determine what God's will is all about in your life; but, ultimately it is up to you, and how well you are willing to follow His leading! No one else is responsible, only you! God gives us a choice, doesn't he?

Okay, so what's your attitude like? That's one thing we need to pray and ask God about, that is, what it means to us, or how our's as a Christian should be. *ATTITUDE?* I think Christians should spell it by placing a "G" for Grateful or Godly and "R" for Righteousness at the beginning making our attitude always *Gratitude*.

When you loose your cool and chose hate, jealousy, malice, envy, greed, fear, pride, guilt, and any other feeling or action over the will of God you lose much more than the mere curse word you said; or the ill look or contempt you blessed someone with. You lost for that moment your place in the vineyards, your ministry, your rewards, the imperishable service of the Master, and only He can give it back. He will, if you only ask, but ask you must, ask for His forgiveness.

As a LOVING WILLING SERVANT TRUSTING GOD, we should give thanks in all things, because we know who the Father is and believe He has our best interests at heart. As such the Bible give us essentially a code of ethics for the Christian, contrasting Kingdom values against the world's.

You know, I fully believe a SECRET in LIFE LIES IN BEING GRATEFUL, for what God has given us, happy no matter what the circumstances are, knowing and being ready to answer those who ask why we have such hope. Isn't that what it is all about? We can be this way Psalm 32:8 ***"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you."*** Or this. Psalm 32:9 ***"Be not like a horse or a mule, without understanding, which must be curbed with bit and bridle, or it will not stay near you."***

YOU HAVE EVERYTHING TO GAIN BY BEING THE GRATEFUL SERVANT, WITH FULL GRATITUDE FOR WHAT YOU HAVE, BEING SECURE IN YOUR PLACE IN THE VINEYARDS, NO MATTER WHERE IT IS, UNTIL HE LEADS YOU ELSEWHERE.

A word of caution here: Many people end up getting their priorities mixed up when seeking what ministry or the place in the vineyards they should be about. Then too, many preachers and churches confuse the issue by being overly exuberant concerning churchly things, often trying to shame you into service to the church. God doesn't want you to do things in His vineyards because you have to; He wants you to do things out of love, *because you want to*.

Your ***priorities*** are, or should be: **1)** To get to know God, fellowshiping with Him by prayer and the reading of His word; your new life manual. Making God first in your life. **2)** Your wife or husband; your helper in this world is your second priority. **3)** Your children; your disciples, your family beyond your mate. **4)** Your place in the vineyards, your ministry; the job you do nine-five that earns you money, certainly not necessarily things you do at the church. **5)** The church, not the buildings, not the organization, not the pastors, the people, the congregation, fellowshiping with them, the people like yourself, singing songs and praising God, discipling others and being discipled.

Don't let people confuse you about these things, too often they have an agenda which is mostly of their own making not God's. Be careful, know your place and hang on to it, God will be pleased with you if you do.

So What's Next? Good and God; evil and Devil; the difference is only one letter. Behind the power of Good lies Goodness, or God Himself. Behind our evil desires and temptation lies worldly evil personified, the devil. Satan, is a fallen angel (Isaiah 14:12-23). Paul tells us in Ephesians 6:11, 12, ***“stand guard against the devil’s schemes. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.”***

The devil only tempts those wishing to lead a sinless life, the others already belong to him: he has no need to tempt them. Evil often reigns supreme in the world. Who is behind this? None other than Satan, or the effects thereof.

The ultimate aim of Satan is to destroy every human (John 10:10). He will, if allowed by us, lead us to the path of destruction; and he tries to prevent, through all manner of deception, anyone from coming to a belief in Christ. ***“The god of the age, the devil, has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the Gospel of the Glory of Christ, who is the image of God.”*** I2 Corinthians 4:4

All of us have something to hide, Things we are ashamed of. Things we do not want others to know; even our closest friends or spouses. We each put up barriers to protect ourselves, saying you can only come so far then, “Keep Out!” Temptation is not sin. The devil sometimes puts thoughts into our minds that we know are wrong. We have a choice to accept or reject them. If we accept it we are one step away from sin. By rejecting it we do as Jesus did. He was ***“tempted in every way, just as we are, yet was without sin,*** Hebrews 4:15

Jesus knew scriptures and quoted them to Satan which is a good reason to study and learn them. Satan on the other hand accuses, “Look at what you did! You say you are a Christian. You can’t be. What a terrible thing to think. You are no good. Who could love such an evil despicable person like you.” So you say, “Oh no! I can’t be a Christian. I’m not good enough. I’ve blown it so it doesn’t matter anymore. I may as well go ahead and do it since I’ve already failed.”

Satan’s tactics are accusation, condemnation and deception making the temptation pathway to sin easy. He wants failure to become a pattern in our lives, that way we fall into sin more easily. The more we sin the more he has control over our life. The more we sin, the easier it is to sin. It’s a snow ball rolling down a hill effect. The more it rolls the bigger it gets.

The Good News, as stated in Colossians 1:13, is God has rescued us from ***“the dominion of darkness and brought us into the light, into the kingdom of the Son He loves.”*** We only have to accept it as being so. Once we have been transferred into the light instead of darkness and Jesus is King of our lives, there is forgiveness, freedom, life, and salvation. We are transferred from Satan’s charge to God’s. Satan is conquered as it says in Luke 10:17-20, Jesus “disarmed the powers and authorities” and “made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross”, that’s why Satan and his demons are so frightened by the name Jesus, Acts 16:18. They are defeated!

In Jesus we are no longer condemned. He sets us free from addictions, sexual immorality, all sins, and He breaks the fear of death, because He defeated death. We are set free from all fear, and all things that belong to the kingdom of darkness, bringing us into the Kingdom of Light.

Nevertheless, the war is not over. Though Satan is disarmed, defeated and demoralized he is not destroyed yet. You must take a stand in the name of Jesus. The greatest weapon of all of course is prayer. "Satan trembles when he see the weakest Christian on his knees." In Jesus life prayer and action went hand in hand. *"Go ye and do likewise."*

In like manner Romans 12:12 says, ***"Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God, this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is, His good, pleasing and perfect will."***

A Christian is called to be a butterfly rather than a chameleon. A chameleon changes to fit its background like some Christians do. They are willing to adjust their standards with the world that they may fit in. However, Christians are not called to fit in, but to be different. Not to be odd though, wearing weird cloths and hats, or speak religious languages so no one knows what they are saying. We are to be more or less normal, using Christ as our measuring stick. We must shed our old patterns of life and pick up the new as exemplified by God. No longer can we grumble and gripe, complaining about this and that, tearing down people along the way.

We can no longer be backbiters, rather we must become encouragers, building up, constantly loving others. We should be thankful in all things and full of joy. How can we do all these things, only through Holy Spirit and Christ? We must most especially take on new standards that deal with sexual purity, and morality.

God warns us about going outside the boundaries He sets up for us. There is no such things as casual sex. Every act of sexual intercourse involves a "one flesh" union (1 Corinthians 6:13-20). When a union is broken, people get hurt. Such breaking apart causes brokenness, a ripping of flesh that was joined together. It leaves life long scars.

Romans 12:2 says, *"be transformed."* God does not ask us to leave the good life behind, but He does expect us to throw out our rubbish. For if we include these things in our life we are trying to serve two masters, loving one and hating the other. Like the bag lady who lived and died on the street. Upon investigation it was found she was rich. She owned a large home and had a wealthy inheritance. But she liked her life the way it was and never claimed her inheritance. So too are we if we remain in the world and continue to live in its clutches.

As Christians we inherit far more than we can imagine. However, to enjoy them we must leave the rubbish of our life behind, hating what is evil. In doing so we gain far more than we left behind. We are urged by Paul in Romans 12:13-21 to be in generous harmony, be hospitable, forgiving, empathetic, living in peace, which draws us deeper into the family of God, where good is not overcome by evil.

How can we be these things? By accepting Christ as our Lord and Savior, we become pleasing to God. We should give Him all our time, allowing Him to establish the priorities in life. Therein lies a greater freedom that we could imagine.

Set aside time to be alone with Him, and other Christians, encourage one another. Offer your ambitions to the Lord. Nothing is wrong with wanting to be successful, just become successful in the way of the Lord, then you will find happiness. The world is full of so-called successful and greedy people who are miserable.

Jesus says in Matthew 6:33, to seek Him and all the things we believe we should be about will come about. We need to *give Him our ears*, that we might hear what we should hear. *Give Him our mouths*, the tongue is powerful enough to destroy or to bring love. *Give Him your hands*, let them do no sexually immoral acts, or murderous deeds. Finally *give Him your whole*

body as a living sacrifice. Jesus, however did not come to make our life easy but to make us great. God loves us and wants us to make the very best of our life. He wants to entrust to us, His power, and His will for our life so we can, “*test and approve what God’s will is, His good, pleasing and perfect will.*” Romans 12:2.

Some will insist on running their own life anyway. Many so-called Christians do. What they are saying is, “I don’t trust You God.” I can handle this all by myself. I’ll let you know when I want something, other than that, leave me alone. I’ll do all right by myself. *Be careful.* Being left to our own devices is not a good place to be. The little sacrifices God asks us to make are nothing to what we will gain in following His will.

Jesus, God’s only Son, endured terrible pain and suffering. So, it is absurd not to trust him. Romans 8:32: “*He who did not spare His only Son, but gave Him up for us all, how will He not also, along with Him, graciously give us all things.*”

Let us pray: Thank you Lord God for your loving guidance and patience. Help us to become diligent in our ways. Show us new and hidden things in the days to come that we might grow stronger in Your ways. Amen

Christianity For Today Session Six

Let us pray: Lord God, We are nearing the end of our journey of learning during this course, teach us anew. Make in us a willingness to not only serve You but place within our hearts a desire and a hunger to bring others into Your kingdom of righteousness now and forever. Amen

Everybody Sing: God Will Make a Way

How Can I Spread the Good News to Others? *Remember God blesses us so we can bless others!* Contrary to popular belief, our faith isn't a private matter. Why is it we are perfectly willing to stand up and make a fool of ourselves at a football game, yelling and jumping up and down when our team did something great?

Well I want to ask you similar question. When you went to such a great game and your team won do you remember how great you felt when you left the stadium. Do you feel that same way when you leave church; ASK GOD WHY NOT? You should feel some of that same exuberance, ready to go out and tell the world, or anybody that will listen, what a great thing that happened in your church in your life, how excited you are to have witnessed it.

If you do not feel that way ASK GOD why are you so willing to share about the great game but not about your church, or Christ in your life, or about Christ in your family's life. Think about it. WHAT GOOD IS YOUR RELIGION UNLESS IT MAKES A DIFFERENCE?

There's a million reasons why we should spread the Good News about Christ. I want to give you THREE. The main reason why we should testify is it is A COMMANDMENT FROM JESUS. GO appears in the Bible 1,514 times, 233 times in the New Testament, and 54 times in Matthew alone. JESUS TELLS US TO GO TO THE LOST SHEEP. He tells us to go and TELL, Go and INVITE ALL you meet, then he says Go and MAKE DISCIPLES.

In fact Jesus' last words in Matthew 28:18-20 says, ***"All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."***

We are all called to live an exemplary life, so that others will ask why we have the hope, the faith in us. But, did you realize we were all led to Christ by someone. Whether they played a major part in our actual conversion or not, they played an integral part. Plus, many, many unknown people planted seeds in our life along the way. The real truth is someone talked to you about Christ or you wouldn't be reading this now. Don't we owe the same to others? WE DIDN'T JUST WANDER INTO A CHURCH AND SAY "CAN YOU SAVE ME BROTHER?"

Religion won't do it. The building programs won't do it. The preachers can't do it by themselves. Though the pastor, hymns, building and religion can carry you along the way, somewhere in the past, your starting point, God placed someone in your path. Someone who made the difference you needed at the time. A WILLING SEED SPREADER. THAT'S WHAT WE'RE CALLED TO DO SPREAD SEEDS. The reason we tell others is basic, people need Jesus Christ. Let's play a what if game. I'll tell you a story. You say what if it is real. What if it really applies to me, to my life? How would I react?

Okay What if you were traveling with a bunch of people and found yourself in the middle of the Sahara Desert without water. Needing water to survive, each of you struck out in different directions to find it. You JUST HAPPENED to wander into an oasis and fell upon the cool water, drinking deeply until satisfied. It would be extremely selfish if you did not return swiftly and show the others the way to get their thirst satisfied too. WOULDN'T IT?

JESUS, THE LIVING WATER, IS THE ONLY WAY TO SATISFY A SPIRITUALLY THIRSTY HEART. Have you been a willing guide to take the message out to the world. How about your friends? Your family?

What good is having something great, unless you can share it with others. Usually when something great happens in our life, the first thing we want to do is to share what happened to those closest to us, our loved ones, our friends, WHY AREN'T WE WILLING TO DO THE SAME WITH THE GREATEST TREASURE WE CAN EVER FIND?

People are starving for the truth. Without Christ's influence in our life we feel empty. Our spirituality has been wiped out by many different aspects of life. We don't know how to express ourselves and so we attempt to fill the void with drugs, alcohol, sex and money. It doesn't work does it?

We've seen the truth. WE SHOULD BE WILLING TO SHOUT IT OUT, come all you who are thirsty come and drink of the well that will not only quench your thirst, but give you eternal life and blessings untold here and now. Why is it Jehovah witnesses and Mormons are free to spread false teachings door to door in our neighborhoods but we are intimidated to even say the name of Jesus when we speak to our neighbor? They are obligated to their church to evangelize or they will not make it into heaven according to their teachings. Mormons are even free to drag you and your ancestors into their cult records if you mistakenly use their computers while trying to look up your ancestors. It almost happened to us but at the last minute we saw what would have happened and stopped the process.

Okay, another what if story. What if you heard of a fabulously wealthy and powerful person giving away say, \$10 million to anyone who would join his exclusive group. All you have to do is accept certain rules to live by, and all the rules would be good for you. Eventually you would get to move to a great and magnificent new city filled with eternal light, and streets paved with gold and jewels. Until then all you have to do is TRY to obey the rules until the wealthy man sends his son to judge whether or not you did a good job, then you'd get your \$10 million. It's in the form of an inheritance.

"Hey, you're saying, If I join this club, follow all those rules, I don't get my money unless some big brass looks me over to see if I qualify? What a bummer."

Yeah, but wait till you get a load of the great benefits. You join now and receive all the rights and privileges as though you were already judged worthy. The club allows you to speak to the highest authority, who incidentally knows everything about you and your needs, even your thoughts, and best yet he loves you like a father. Furthermore, you can contact him day or night, no matter where you might be in the world. Through an exclusive toll-free communication network, setup for the club members, you get the best tailor-made advice available about anything you need to know.

"Hey, that's a pretty good deal; but, just when do I get my money?"

Wait that's not all, not only can you call on him anytime you have a problem, but they'll send a special emissary or even a whole army on your behalf, if they think you need it. ANOTHER GREAT BENEFIT, THE ENTIRE CLUB MEMBERSHIP WILL ACCEPT YOU LIKE YOU'RE PART OF THE FAMILY OR THEY'LL JUST BE A FRIEND IF THAT'S ALL YOU WANT.

“That's the best club I've ever heard of, but I'm not sure I'm ready to follow a whole bunch of rules. How much would it cost if I just went ahead and paid the dues so I could get benefits, and I'll think about the other for awhile. I'm pretty smart, I'm sure I can find out when the big guy is coming so I can get ready, that way I won't have to follow the rules and still get my \$10 million.”

Sorry, it doesn't work that way. You can't buy a membership, and there's no way you can know when he is coming, not even the big guy's son knows that.

“What do you mean? What kind of club is this anyhow?”

Tell you what, you seem like a nice person, why don't you go to one of the meetings, you'll be glad you did. They have a lot of fun singing special songs. It makes you feel great. You'll probably even look at things differently when you leave. Everybody in the club is good people, just like you. You might even join on the spot.

What would you do? Would you go to such a meeting to check it out? Would you join? Would you attend all the meetings and support the organization? Would you become a member of good standing? Would you tell others?

Which brings us to another reason to testify about a life with Christ, WE SHOULD FEEL A NEED TO PASS IT ON. God made us that way. When we hear good news we want to share it, sometimes for the wrong reasons, yet it is a natural desire to share what we know and they don't. If we appreciate the good news of the Gospel we should be bursting to tell others, how about you?

Ephesians 3:14-21 says, ***“So I bow in prayer before the Father from whom every family in heaven and on earth gets its true name. I ask the Father in his great glory to give you the power to be strong inwardly through His Spirit. I pray that Christ will live in your hearts by faith and that your life will be strong in love and be built on love. And I pray that you and all God's holy people will have the power to understand the greatness of Christ's love - how wide and how long and how high and how deep that love is. Christ's love is greater than anyone can ever know, but I pray that you will be able to know that love. Then you can be filled with the fullness of God. With God's power working in us, God can do much, much more than anything we can ask or imagine. To Him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus for all time, forever and ever. Amen.”***

“Okay, you got me, how do I go about telling others,” you say?

That's why I shared the stories with you. It can give you some ideas; But first, we want to warn you about two aspects concerning telling others. FIRST, being so excited that you want to tell everyone, blurting out words without planing or letting Holy Spirit have His way. There was a term used by many, “Don't pull me down your well”, which was apropos.

You've seen cartoons where people get hit over the head with a Bible, they resent it. Remember that picture, it'll keep you from making a similar mistake. You must be sensitive to the needs of others, where they are, listen to what they are saying. Let Holy Spirit give you both the words and insight of how to help the person before you speak.. HE WILL GLADLY LEAD YOU, PROVIDING WHAT THEY NEED NOT WHAT YOU WANT THEM TO HAVE. ABOVE ALL REMEMBER YOU ARE ONLY A SEED SPREADER; only God can grow the seeds sown. Don't take it personally if it seems you failed. You are spreading GOD'S WORD AND IT WILL NOT GO OUT VOID, WITHOUT ACCOMPLISHING ITS TASK.

We are called to teach society, not condemn it, to bring about healings not division. We are called to get involved. If we speak out about the decay of moral standards we must also offer the way of changing it, the reason for our personal testimony.

JESUS SAYS, WE ARE TO BE LIGHTS. We know about a lighthouse. But what about each of us? Jesus says we become this light by doing good deeds. At work people notice whether we display a continuity of genuine love and concern towards them.

The things Christians say and do are heavily scrutinized. They watch our honesty, truthfulness, hard work, reliability, or our lack of the same or gossip or backbiting criticisms. Even our driving habits, and what we do when they salute with hand gesture. Let there be no mistake, we influence hundreds of lives without a word being spoken. Are you a good influence, or a closet Christian, waiting bashfully to discover what the other person thinks before venturing a word that might disclose what you stand for?

Be who God has called you to be and do it well! Live out your Christian life in the most appropriate way God leads you to, that you may bring those assigned to you to the Lord. We are not all called to be a Mother Teresa, only that we should play the part He gives us. IF WE DO THIS WE SERVE GOD, NO GREATER, NOR ANY LESS THAN SHE DID.

Never argue with anyone, you will drive away more in arguing than you ever will by listening and in all gentleness ministering to the needs of others. Millions of people have objections to Christianity. Often questions come up about all the rules and the confusion between different denominations. Work out the answers to common questions so you are prepared. If they ask specific questions that you truly know the answer to, do so. But avoid direct confrontation unless so directed by Holy Spirit, LEST YOU DO MORE DAMAGE THAN GOOD. Every mature Christian has horror stories about trying to argue someone into the Kingdom of God. It usually is not what God wants us to be about.

“COME AND YOU WILL SEE,” communicate the good news to those outside the faith. Invite others to join you in worship, a fellowship meeting, Bible study. If you are a new Christian sometimes this is the most effective way, yet always inject your own personal testimony regardless to how new you are to the Lord. It will have the most impact.

Albert McMakin a nondescript farmer was instrumental in bring literally hundreds of thousands of people from all walks of life across the globe to Christ. In 1934 he filled his truck with people for a revival meeting. There was one young man that Albert especially wanted to go, yet the young man was more interested in girls; Albert asked him to drive the truck, suggesting he bring along several of his girl friends and they could use the truck during the meeting. To the young man's chagrin his girl friends wanted to go to the meeting. Reluctantly he went too, he had nothing else to do. However, during the meeting he found himself having thoughts he never had before. He volunteered to drive Albert's truck again, and again, until one night he too went forward and gave his life to Christ. The young friend Albert McMakin invited was Billy Graham. We can't all be a Billy Graham; but, WE CAN ALL BE LIKE ALBERT MAKIN AND BRING OUR FRIENDS TO JESUS.

You are GOD'S EMISSARY. Remember it is God who grows the seeds you plant. Tell a story of what happened to you, when God met a need that was critical, a healing, a joy, a triumph, SOMETHING YOU FEEL HOLY SPIRIT HAS REMINDED YOU OF WHEN YOU ARE SHARING CHRIST TO SOMEONE.

Tell them why you believe in Jesus Christ, what your life was like before you accepted Christ as your Lord and Savior, what caused you to change your attitude and turn your life around, tell where you were when this all happened, tell what difference Jesus has made in your whole life since you were saved. TELL HOW THROUGH PRAYER, THROUGH THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT, THROUGH THE CHANGES HE MADE IN YOUR LIFE, YOU HAVE CHANGED. Sometimes we see a lot of God's power displayed, yet at many churches little is seen. INVITE PEOPLE TO COME AND SEE, talk about what is happening here. LET THEM KNOW GOD IS THE SAME TODAY AS HE WAS YESTERDAY.

Invite them to a Christianity for Today course. TELL THEM HOW MUCH IT MEANT TO YOU. Pray in the spirit while you are witnessing or giving your testimony, allowing Him to interject things from your past, scripture, things you are amazed you say as you say them, things that come from a region deep within your soul.

Prayer is the most important element, DON'T FORGET IT, if you do you will recognize what you have done when you walk away. A TESTIMONY, OR WITNESS, FROM THE FLESH IS MOSTLY FLAT AND INEFFECTIVE.

Finally in GALATIONS 6:7-9 IT SAYS ***“Do not be deceived, God will not be mocked; for whatever a man sows, this he will also reap. For the one who sows to his own flesh shall from the flesh reap corruption, but the one who sows to the Spirit shall from the Spirit reap eternal life. And let us not lose heart in doing good, for in due time we shall reap if we do not grow weary.”***

What's Right and What's Wrong with the Church Today? I am appalled at the things happening to our church leadership; however I know only too well that all leadership, except as when dictatorial is reality simply is a reflection of the people collectively, as a society.

Oh no not a another gloomy heavy teaching, you say? Not at all, for tomorrow is also the first day of the rest of your life, and you should live it as though you know the truth and have faith in the God of hope. Today is the most glorious time in the history of the world.

In 1 Corinthians 6:2-11 we are told to not worry about other folks, only keep ourselves proper in His sight, for we are being groomed to sit on the judgment seat with Christ! Not only that, we are to judge the angels ! How can we worry, rebellious church leaders or even ordinary persons will not prevail against Christ, even though at times we might think it so, our job is to keep on keeping on in faith, isn't it?

Nevertheless, many feel the end times are imminent, although none of us know when? Do you feel that from your own understanding or that of others, and if so who are the others? Who do you listen to? Do you feel woefully inadequate to sit in judgment of men much less angels? Of course you do and so do I however in James 3:13-17 it says if any one lacks wisdom let him ask! For the wisdom that comes from heaven is pure! Always remember that!

Have you ever tried to remember what you look like? Try it some time, it will surprise you. God gave me a word a long time ago, I have used it not only in my life but in the business I've had at that time and have tried to apply it in everything, for it is important. He simply said, "See yourself as others do." Now if you take this to heart you will also apply it to hearing and in all areas of your life.

So then if our leadership be bad then we need only look in the mirror of society to see why; and as in ancient times when ungodly men are ruled by ungodly rulers, their lot was destruction and all manner of captivity; conversely when good leadership came forth from the bosom of a prayerful few, God always granted prosperity according to the extent the people became righteous. It is proven time and time again through a study of the Old Testament that our country will only last according to how righteous we are collectively. Pockets of righteous people are important to God and He will bless them, but unless we pray fervently and place action where our mouth is, nothing will change.

Okay, what do we intend to do about it? We should be living in the promises now, not waiting for tomorrow. I placed a sign on the mirror in the bathroom where I would see it when I was grooming myself for the days chores. "What difference would it make in your life if you knew Jesus were coming back tomorrow?

Matthew 16:18b: ***“...upon this Rock, I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it.”***

What happened you say? It often seems the church is just as corrupt as the society it tries to lead. Through it all Jesus' is still building His Church. Revelation says it plainly though all the churches have problems they need to repent of. Jesus is building and will prevail in His task to make a perfect Church without spot and blemish. However, always remember the Church means the people who God has called, not the buildings or leaders. Jesus will never be a part of building, a denomination or a movement. The Church He seeks is not a denomination or an organized religion.

Today we often discern that "church" is something that we must attend, build, or grow. In realizing that the Church does not belong to us we can relinquish our claims and labor together with the Lord concerning the church. Since it is the Lord's Church, it does not belong to a denominational office, church board, circle of elders, founding apostle, or individual pastor.

Let us pray: Lord God, we offer ourselves to You as best we know how. Thank You for accepting us as we are, and having patience with us. Help us to have patience with ourselves and others. Lead us, help us, guide us, and in our travels let us not fail to recognize the wants and needs of others over that of our own. Help us be encouragers oh Lord, teach us to have a heart for saving those less fortunate than ourselves, and not look with disdain at those who lost their way. In and through Jesus Christ we pray.

AMEN