



CHRISTIAN UNION



BIBLE COURSE MANUAL

SEEKING GOD LIFESTYLE

A 5-LESSON COURSE

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FORWARD

About this Bible Course

Each of the five lessons in this Bible course is broken down into five separate studies. This content can be completed on your own or will also work well in the context of a small group.

If a study like this is new to you, you may find that you will get more out of it by praying each day as you begin—for wisdom, understanding, and clarity about specific next steps in your life—and then by taking time to thoughtfully and honestly write down answers to the questions as you go.

Christian Union's hope is that these lessons will help you experience and walk with God in new and powerful ways that make a difference not only in your life, but in your world.



CHRISTIAN UNION

Founded in 2002, Christian Union develops and connects transformative Christian leaders in three different ministry contexts:

Christian Union Universities develops disciples of Jesus Christ at some of the nation's most influential, secular universities, including Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Harvard Law, Penn, Princeton, Stanford, and Yale.

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LESSON ONE

Intended for Life with the Spirit of God

“As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God.” Psalm 42:1-2

“Our hearts are restless until they find their rest in thee.” St. Augustine

This manual is about seeking God for the increase of His Spirit’s presence and work in our lives. We need the Holy Spirit’s nearness and help continually. But it may not be obvious why we ought to crave the Spirit’s perennial partnership. In this first lesson, we will study the Bible’s overarching emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of God’s crowning creative achievement of the human race.

From the beginning, we were designed to be filled with God’s Spirit at all times for the fullness of life. For abundance of life is found in the presence of God: “You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore” (Psalm 16:11). The sacrifice of Jesus on the cross and His resurrection was a step forward in restoring that original plan of life for us.¹

¹ Thanks to Chuck Hetzler in addition to several CU ministry fellows who helped write and edit this Seeking God Lifestyle Bible Course manual.

Created to be Filled by the Life of God

When you first heard of the concept of a “Seeking God Lifestyle,” what feelings and ideas first came to mind? Did they involve “fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore” or something entirely different?

Humanity lost God’s original design for life with Him when Adam and Eve chose to seek what they thought was pleasure and power outside of God’s provision and sovereignty. But God set in motion a plan of redemption to return His promise of true life.

God designed human life to flourish under certain conditions. Fish need water; flowers require sunshine and moisture; humans need the life of God. Without Him, our lives will always be lacking fullness.

Genesis reveals that the nature of humankind is both physical and spiritual. In fact, the spiritual part of our existence is of greater importance. God warned Adam about death when He said:

Genesis 2:16-17 You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it *you shall surely die* (italics added).

However, the day that Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, they did not die physically. Physical death was set in motion on that day, but judging by the rest of the Scriptures, spiritual death was the greater consequence.

Spiritual death is the primary problem for humanity according to the New Testament too. The Apostle Paul wrote of our mortal spiritual condition often:

Ephesians 2:1 “And you were dead in the trespasses and sins...”

Ephesians 2:5 “Even when we were dead in our trespasses...”

Colossians 2:13 “And you, who were dead in your trespasses...”

For this reason, Jesus declared that every person must be “born again.”

John 3:3 Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

Read Ephesians 2:1-8. According to this passage, what does spiritual death look like for humanity? How do people act and relate to God and to the world around them when they are spiritually dead? How do humans come to life again?

When they sinned, Adam and Eve were banished from the Garden of Eden, where the tree of life was and where they used to enjoy the presence of God (Genesis 3:22). From the time of their exit from the Garden, humankind’s primary problem was spiritual death and separation from their Creator and closest companion.

Contrast Adam and Eve’s former life in the garden in the presence of God, with life locked out of the garden and apart from God.

Sometimes modern Christianity has been reduced merely to salvation and eternal life. But God wants to restore His life to us here and now, between initial salvation and eternal life. Famous nineteenth century English Baptist preacher, Charles Haddon Spurgeon said, “I believe the Christian man ought to be the happiest man in the world.” Our happiness comes from God Himself, who has made His home in us until we go to be with Him.

So our pursuit as Christians is for God Himself. All that we do in practice must always be about finding His life in us. That is His original design and the purpose of redemption. Our goal is not Bible knowledge, theological understanding, social service, or a disciplined spiritual life. All of these elements should occupy a place in the Christian life, but they are not our aim. Twentieth century American pastor and author, A.W. Tozer (1897-1963), put it this way:

For it is not mere words that nourish the soul, but God Himself, and unless and until the hearers find God in personal experience they are not the better for having heard the truth. The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into Him, that they may delight in His Presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God Himself in the core and center of their hearts.²

² *The Pursuit of God* (Harrisburg, PA: Christian Publications, 1948), iv.

Read John 5:39-40. What does Jesus' rebuke of the Pharisees reveal as a potential pitfall in studying the Bible?

What did Jesus say is the intent of the Scriptures?

Study of the Scriptures is always meant to lead us to encounter a Person and to experience His life. Some of the Psalms provide a window into the experiential side of a heart that longs for God Himself. **Pick one of the following Psalms to read: 42, 63, or 73.**

After reading, record any thoughts that resonate with your own experience of longing for God:

The Second Adam and the Holy Spirit

Jesus came to Earth for many reasons. Among others things, Jesus lived a perfect life as a human being. He lived the life that Adam should have lived. How do each of the following verses from the New Testament refer to Jesus as a “second Adam”?

Romans 5:12-21

1 Corinthians 15:22, 45

As the ideal human, Jesus showed us that God’s original plan for our lives is to be filled with the Holy Spirit. Jesus did not conduct His earthly ministry out of His own divine power.

The Gospel of Luke highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in the earthly life of Jesus, God in the flesh. At the outset of His ministry, Jesus was “full of the Holy Spirit” (Luke 4:1). The second Adam walked in “the power of the Spirit” and healed by “the power of the Lord.” In Luke 4:14-21, Jesus makes His own personal mission statement, which is built on the idea that He has been anointed by the Spirit of God. In fact, the very word “Christ” and its Hebrew equivalent, “Messiah,” literally means “anointed one.”

Jesus’ Spirit-filled life was meant to be a new model for humanity and to be followed by His disciples. The way that Jesus lived by the Spirit was meant to be imitated by us. We could never and should never think we can imitate His perfect ethical righteousness or the atoning sacrifice He paid. But when it comes to His life of dependence on the Spirit, we are meant to fully participate, even if imperfectly.

In fact, one of the hallmarks of Jesus’ teaching was His promise to give the same Holy Spirit to His followers. Jesus was not merely the one who had the Spirit; He was the one who could give the Spirit.

Acts 1:4-5 And while staying with them he ordered them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to wait for the promise of the Father, which, he said, “you heard from me; for John baptized³ with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.”

³ The Bible uses a variety of words interchangeably to describe our experience of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit “comes on” (Acts 19:6), “falls,” (Acts 10:44), “empowers” (1 Corinthians 12:11), “rests on” (Numbers 11:26), and we “receive” (Acts 8:15) “are baptized” (Acts 1:5), “are filled” (Acts 2:4).

Also:

Acts 1:8 “But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

Why do you think Jesus ordered his disciples not to depart until they had encountered the Holy Spirit?

Do you think that some of the consequences you listed above could apply to us, His disciples today, if we are not also “baptized with the Holy Spirit?” If so, which ones?

Throughout the New Testament book of Acts, we see Jesus’ apostles and others doing what Jesus did by the power and help of the Holy Spirit. They too spoke God’s word boldly, healed sickness, cast out demons, and were filled with joy. The promise of the Spirit came not only on the apostles but also on all those who believed in the Christ. How did the Spirit empower believers in each of these situations?

Acts 4:8

Acts 8:29,39

Acts 13:9

The second Adam was the first of many, leading a new body of people who would now be renewed in God’s original image—a humanity filled with His Spirit and fully alive (Colossians 3:10), as God had designed from the beginning.

Read Acts 2:1-40, which includes Peter’s first public speech. What are 2-3 major points in the passage? Where do you see the Spirit at work? What is the expectation of the Spirit’s continual work for those to whom Peter speaks?

The Promise of the Spirit for All

It wasn't just Jesus' idea to give the Holy Spirit to His disciples. The Old Testament looked forward to the day when God's Spirit would be given to all of God's people. Jesus was intentionally fulfilling the promises of the Father in the Hebrew Scriptures.

Before the Christ came, the Spirit was only sparingly given to individuals in leadership. Interestingly, the first person in the Old Testament who was said to be "filled with the Spirit of God" was the chief workman for the tabernacle—the place of sacrifice and worship.

Specifically, how did the Spirit direct the work of Bezalel in **Exodus 31:1-5; 35:30-31**?

However, there was a longing in the heart of God and His Old Testament prophets to see the Spirit given broadly to people from every background and rank.

Moses hoped for more:

Numbers 11:29 "Would that all the LORD's people were prophets, that the LORD would put his Spirit on them!"

Ezekiel looked forward to God's new work:

Ezekiel 36:26-27 And I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you. And I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules.

Joel promised the widespread work of the Spirit:

Joel 2:28-29 And it shall come to pass afterward, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy your old men shall dream dreams and your young men shall see vision. Even on the male and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

Jesus' followers were thrilled to have God with them in the flesh (cf. Matthew 1:23). But Jesus knew that something better was coming in the Spirit's outpouring. However, the Spirit could not be given in increased measure until Jesus had finished His work (John 7:39). Still, He sought to build His disciples' anticipation for the Spirit's coming. The great hope for the Spirit's arrival for centuries since humanity's expulsion from the Garden was about to be met. So, Jesus told them:

John 16:7 I tell you the truth: it is to your advantage that I go away, for if I do not go away, the Helper will not come to you. But if I go, I will send him to you.

Two of the key features of the New Testament—or New Covenant—include the coming of the Messiah and the giving of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit's increased work was a major hope for those in the Old Testament—or Old Covenant—and so it is a celebrated, central aspect for believers in the post-Messiah era.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:1-18. Compare and contrast the Old and New Covenants vis-à-vis the Spirit's role.

In the Old Testament, the presence of God was accessed in the tabernacle, or later, temple. Read **Psalm 84**. Put yourself in the psalmist's shoes and imagine the limitations you would have felt regarding your personal experience of God. Then read **John 4:20-24** and write your thoughts on the significance of Jesus' statement about "worship in spirit" and how your experience ought to differ from Old Covenant believers.

Praise God that we are living in the age where our God can be sought because of the sacrifice of Jesus. Even greater, as a result of our seeking and His faithfulness to His promise to send the Spirit to those who ask, He will pour out His Spirit among us!

Receiving the Indwelling Spirit by Faith

Now that we are in the era of the Spirit's work, how do we experience Him?

The Spirit is received by faith alone in Jesus alone.

The Spirit of God is received only by faith in Jesus. Generally, the Holy Spirit comes to a person when he/she first believes in Jesus as Lord and Savior.

The book of Acts allows us to see that the Holy Spirit came to each new person or group who believed the message about Jesus. The Bible often explains that the Lord was operative in new believers even before or as they heard the Gospel. What was the Spirit's involvement in the following passages?

Acts 10:3-6

Acts 16:14

While the Spirit is gracious even in drawing us to God while we are still dead in our trespasses and sins and therefore before we can believe, faith is the key that opens the door to welcome the Holy Spirit inside of an individual.

The Holy Spirit can't be bought with money (Acts 8:18-24) or earned by good merits (Galatians 3:2); He comes to us only by faith in the name of Jesus.

Galatians 3:13-14 Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, “Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree”—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.

The Spirit comes to live inside a believer.

The Holy Spirit is the third person of the Trinity. He was present from the beginning (Genesis 1:2). While the Bible does not use the word “Trinity,” it is the easiest word that explains the oneness of God, who exists in three persons. The Father is fully God. The Son is fully God. The Spirit is fully God. They exist distinctly and eternally in perfect unity. We affirm the Trinity by faith and not because we completely understand God's nature, which seems natural if we are the creature and He is the Creator.

The Holy Spirit has always been active in the world, especially in the work of God's redemption. However, He rarely "came upon" or "filled" people in the Old Testament. But now in the New Covenant, the Spirit comes to live inside every believer. Jesus explained this major difference of the Spirit's life inside the believer between Old and New Covenants:

John 14:16-17 I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you *and will be in you.*
(Italics added.)

What do you think Jesus meant when he told his disciples concerning the Holy Spirit "you know Him, for He dwells WITH you and will be IN you?"

For a Jewish believer who considered the presence of God to be sacredly housed only in the temple, it would have been an incredible thought to consider God residing inside an individual. But that's exactly the seismic shift that Jesus' New Covenant brought. Paul referred to believers, individually and corporately, as the new temple of God.

In the following verses, take note of where the Spirit is now housed.

1 Corinthians 3:16-17

1 Corinthians 6:19-20

Read John 14:16-26 to learn more about Jesus' teaching about the Spirit's work and the new reality of God living *in* believers. Write your gleanings below.

Fillings of the Spirit

The Bible describes the Holy Spirit's work in a believer's life in a variety of ways. As yesterday's session noted, the Holy Spirit permanently resides within a believer. But the Bible also speaks often about the Spirit's filling of a believer. Though all Christians are indwelt by the Spirit, not all Christians are filled with the Spirit.

Read Romans 8:9. When does the Spirit enter a person?

According to **Ephesians 4:30**, for those who live in the New Testament age, having faith in the work and person of Jesus, when does the Spirit leave a person?

As a rule, the Spirit comes to live inside a believer at the moment of faith in Christ, and from that point of faith, the Spirit never leaves, i.e. the Christian is "sealed" by the Spirit.

Our relationship with Him is very dynamic. We can be more or less full of the Spirit. On the positive side, Christians can experience a greater fullness of the Spirit. For this reason, Paul encouraged Christians:

Read Ephesians 5:18. What does Paul's admonition imply about the ebb and flow of the Spirit's fullness in our lives?

What does the analogy between filling of wine and filling of the Spirit tell us about how we're affected by the Spirit's presence?

The amount of wine put in the body directly affects the amount of influence we give it over our thoughts and actions. The same is true of the Holy Spirit, but thankfully never with harmful consequences. The degree to which we surrender ourselves to be "under the influence of the Holy Spirit" also directly shapes our demeanor, our words, and even emboldens us to drastic, uninhibited Kingdom living. But just as someone might be dangerously drunk one night, the next day they are back to their own faculties. In a Seeking God Lifestyle, we don't want to allow the influence of the Spirit to wane day in and day out. As Paul put it, we want to be filled with the Spirit, as increasingly as possible.

Remember that in Ephesians 4:30 above, Paul affirmed that these Christians already had the Spirit and “were sealed” by Him. There is a difference between being sealed by the Holy Spirit and being filled by Him.

We see the same possibilities for greater filling of the Spirit in Acts 6:1-4. The apostles needed help caring for needs in the church, so the church was to find men who were “full of the Spirit” (Acts 6:3). We know that the entire church had received the Spirit at this point (Acts 2:38-41). However, some of the new believers had gained more of the Spirit’s fullness than others.

The book of Acts shows many other examples of moments when individuals were “filled with the Spirit” in ways that surpassed the universal indwelling (and “sealing”) of the Holy Spirit. Those instances of greater filling led to increased ability and courage to serve Christ and others in His name.

Take a few moments to look up the following verses and record the impact of the Spirit’s filling in each instance.

Acts 2:4

Acts 4:8

Acts 4:31

Acts 13:9

Acts 13:52

On the other hand, Christians can reduce the fullness of the Spirit within us. We can “grieve” (Ephesians 4:30), “quench” (1 Thessalonians 5:17) or “resist” (Acts 7:51) the Holy Spirit. Read each of these verses and explain why the Spirit’s fullness is limited in each case. You will want to pay attention to the larger context of each verse.

Ephesians 4:30

1 Thessalonians 5:17

Acts 7:51

While the Spirit’s presence in a believer is ever-present, His fullness is dynamic. He can be more or less prominent in our lives. As people observe your life, would they suspect that you are “under the influence” of something outside of yourself? Here’s the key truth to understand, the Spirit’s fullness typically fluctuates based on our activity. In the next lesson, we will learn more about this principle that, according to the word of God, *the Spirit responds to those who seek Him*.

Meditate on James 4:8, “Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.” Write a brief prayer asking God to teach you His principles of attracting His Spirit in greater and increasing measure. Are you willing

to allow Him to fill and influence you to such an extent that you might appear foolish in the world's eyes in order that you might gain true "fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore"? Remember, when someone is drunk on wine they typically don't care what people think about them anyway! Wine is the counterfeit, the Holy Spirit is the original.

Write your honest prayer here:

LESSON TWO

Seeking and Finding God

“And do not get drunk with wine, for that is debauchery, but be filled with the Spirit.” Ephesians 5:18

The more we seek God, the more we experience the fullness of the Spirit. Sometimes, the Spirit works in and through us at times when we aren't looking for Him, but for a Christian, that's the exception. In this lesson we will study examples of this principle at work in the Bible, in history, and in modern times.

When we draw near to God, He draws near to us, both individually and corporately.

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LESSON TWO, DAY ONE

Drawing Near

The Lord Himself is the desire of a believer's heart. We long to feel close to Him, sense His presence, experience His enabling power, hear His voice, and see Him at work as we seek Him and serve others in His name. On Earth, all of those desires are met by the Holy Spirit which is why in Luke 11:13, we read that He is the *greatest* gift the Father can give His children. The Lord truly wants to be near to us. So to meet our desire and His, He has taught us how to be filled with His Spirit through seeking Him in faith.

A sentence in James 4:8 provides one of the most succinct biblical statement on this subject. James writes to Christians who have been resisting the Spirit:

James 4:8 Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

In a word, the way to become more filled by the Spirit is to draw nearer to God. Drawing near to God takes effort and intentionality. Lessons 3-5 of this manual will show you what you can do to seek God and attract His presence every day. But before we jump to the practices of drawing near to God, we want to understand the Biblical concept of God's response to our seeking.

Jesus underscores the same reciprocal principle in His teaching on prayer in Luke 11:5-13.

Take a minute to read **Luke 11:5-13**. What does Jesus promise?

Record the adjectives and verbs that Jesus uses to describe the kind of prayer the Father will honor in the giving of His Spirit in **Luke 11:8-9**.

Are you surprised that Jesus didn't say to pray with quiet reverence, to just wait patiently as if the gifting of the Spirit is God's prerogative? God always wants to pour out His Spirit in greater measure, so it is always His prerogative. He is waiting on us. *Impudence* is a strong word, and Jesus intentionally chose this analogy to show that being a friend of God doesn't assume that He will give us what we ask, namely the Holy Spirit. Jesus said God will give us what we ask when we are almost annoyingly persistent! God wants you to annoy Him with your requests. Jesus reveals that this persistence and determination is exactly what brings God to the door.

Remember, all believers have been given the Spirit, because of our friendship with God. Yet, fillings of the Spirit come to those who seek Him.

The Old Testament portrays the same responsive relationship between God and His people.

Jeremiah 29:13-14 You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you. (cf. Deuteronomy 4:29)

The entire book of 2 Chronicles is devoted to this concept, established on the thesis statement of 2 Chronicles 7:13-14.

2 Chronicles 7:13-14 When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

God promised Old Testament believers that He would draw near to them when they draw near to Him. The spiritual principle of reciprocation is a thoroughly biblical promise from Genesis to Revelation, although some of the particulars may be different from Israel in the Old Testament to Christians in the New Testament era.

The rest of 2 Chronicles relates five episodes where this promise was fulfilled. Dr. Walter Kaiser, Old Testament professor at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, has summed up each episode in the following chart.⁴

IMPERATIVE	2 CHRONICLES	KING UNDER WHOM THE REVIVAL CAME
“Humble yourselves”	11-12	Rehoboam
“Seek my face”	14-16	Asa
“Pray”	17-20	Jehoshaphat
“Turn from your wicked ways”	29-32	Hezekiah
“Humble yourselves”	34-35	Josiah

Each 2 Chronicles story is written to establish the truth that God will certainly draw closer to us when we draw closer to Him. And as with James 4:1-10, 2 Chronicles 7:14 shows us more the “what” and “how” we should draw near to God, which will be our focus later in the manual.

Choose one of the stories from 2 Chronicles and write your notes about what took place. What did you learn about the principle “draw near to God and he will draw near to you?”

⁴ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Revive Us Again: Your Wakeup Call for Spiritual Renewal* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 6.

Seeking God is of Faith

In Lesson 1, Day 2, we noted that the Spirit is given only through personal faith in Jesus. We cannot earn the Spirit's fullness (Galatians 3:2). So, biblically speaking, drawing near to God is a fruit of *faith*. When we put forward effort and intentionality humble ourselves, pray, turn from wickedness, and seek God, *we are not switching to a performance mindset*. We are drawing near to God because we *believe* His promises. Legalism is the pursuit of merit, based on our performance. In stark contrast, a Seeking God Lifestyle is the pursuit of God's presence and power based on our faith in His promise to draw near, knowing that we already stand fully accepted based on Christ's merit alone.

Hebrews 11:6, which defines faith, articulates the inherent connection between faith and seeking God.⁵

Hebrews 11:6 Without faith it is impossible to please him, for whoever would draw near to God must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who seek him.

According to Hebrews 11:6, what are the two essential elements of true faith?

Faith must believe God's existence. Faith must also believe that God rewards those who seek Him. Therefore, at the heart of our relationship with God, we must be Christians who are seeking God, and seeking Him as a Rewarder.⁶

Why is it okay for Christians to seek God as a Rewarder? Why does God want to reward us? What kind of rewards do you think He wants to give? (Remember yesterday's lesson in your answer.)

⁵ There is one Greek root word for faith (pistis) and believe (pisteuo). The English words "faith," "believe" and "trust" all translate the same Greek word group.

⁶ A better translation of the last phrase of Hebrews 11:6 is "that He is the Rewarder of those who seek Him." Also, the word for "seek" could be intensified to mean "diligently seek," but scholars are uncertain whether this form of the Greek verb for "seek" should be intensified.

In the late twentieth century, there was an uprising of “seeker friendly” churches. These churches wanted to make themselves accessible to non-churchgoers, so they put aside formal aspects of worship services and took a much more informal, modern approach. The “seeker friendly” church movement could create category confusion for some Christians today. Biblically speaking, only believers seek God (Hebrews 11:6; Romans 3:11), not those considering Christianity.

The first generations of Christians understood well the biblical category of seeking God. In fact, it was the central theme of their devotion.

Robert Louis Wilken, Professor of the History of Christianity at the University of Virginia, in the introduction to his book, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God*, identifies the spirit of early Christian thinking:

The subtitle *Seeking the Face of God* is based on Psalm 105:4 in the Latin version, “Seek his face always” (*Quaerite faciem eius semper*). This verse is cited four times by Saint Augustine in his work *The Trinity*. More than any other passage in the Bible it captures the spirit of early Christian thinking.⁷

Later on in his book, Wilken explains more thoroughly Augustine’s passion for seeking God as he discusses argumentation in Augustine’s book, *The Trinity*. In the midst of Augustine’s explanation of the Trinity, what becomes clear is his perspective, shared by the vast majority of the early Christian church, that it is the Christian’s duty to experience the very presence of the Lord Himself, not just to possess knowledge about Him.

What Augustine is seeking is not a theological concept or an explanation as such, but the living God who is Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the “Trinity that is God, the true and supreme and only God.” If one asks, what does it mean to find the one God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit?, the answer is not so obvious. Finding means more than simply getting things straight or discovering the most appropriate analogy in human experience for the Triune God. There can be no finding without a change in the seeker. Our minds, he says, must be purified, and we must be made fit and capable of receiving what is sought. We can cleave to God and see the Holy Trinity only when we burn with love.

As we grow in understanding, says Augustine, we think we will reach an end to our search. But the psalmist says, “Seek his face always.” David is not speaking about knowing God as we know other things, but about intimacy with God, delight in God, loving God, knowing even as one is known. As Saint Paul wrote, “If anybody thinks he knows anything, he does not yet know as he ought to know. But anyone who loves God, this person is known by him” (1 Corinthians 8:2-3). As we come to know the God we seek, we discover that finding leads to further seeking. Maturity does not mean arriving, but “stretching out eagerly to what lies ahead” (Philippians 3:13). “Let us then,” says

⁷ Robert Louis Wilken, *The Spirit of Early Christian Thought: Seeking the Face of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), xxii.

Augustine, “seek as those who are going to find, and find as those who are going to go on seeking.” With an uncanny eye for just the right text Augustine quotes the book of Sirach: “When a man has finished, then it is that he is beginning” (Sirach 18:7).

When Augustine returns to the words of the psalm, “Seek his face always,” in the final prayer he says, “I have sought you intellectually” and “I have argued much and toiled much.” But then he adds, “Give me the strength to seek you,” for as “you have caused yourself to be found,” you have given me hope of finding you “more and more,” of remembering you, understanding you, and loving you: “When we do attain to you, there will be an end to these many things which we say and do not attain, and you will remain one, yet all in all, and we shall say one thing praising you in unison, even ourselves also being made one in you.”⁸

The early Christians understood deeply a doctrine that has been largely lost among modern Western Christians: salvation through Christ is the beginning of seeking God and not the ending. God’s glorious gospel revealed through the life and resurrection of Jesus Christ allows everyone who repents and believes to begin the process of seeking God wholeheartedly, and that marvelous adventure begins the day a man or woman receives Jesus Christ as Lord. The rest of his or her life is to be spent passionately, diligently seeking God’s face.

As the passage from Wilken shows, the seeker is changed in the process, because the seeker does not pursue information alone in drawing close to God, but the very presence of God Himself. The seeker and even his family and community cannot help but change as he draws into the presence of the Almighty.

Upon entering into the presence of the one true God, however, the Christian’s delight and desire to experience God’s presence intensifies. Entering into God’s presence is gloriously satisfying and yet, paradoxically, a Christian can never get enough of it.

Read Psalm 105:1-4. Augustine quotes this passage four times in his work, *The Trinity*. One time, he even adds to the end of the fourth verse the word “passionately” or “with a burning desire.” Meditate on verses 3 and 4. Have you ever considered the Christian life as consisting of passionately and continually seeking the face of God? What would you need to do differently to put it into practice?

8. Ibid., 108-09.

Experiencing the Spirit's Filling Personally

Many live the Christian life without the Holy Spirit's strength and direction, and therefore often feel defeated. You will never thrive in the Christian life without the Holy Spirit's filling, and His filling comes as you seek Him with your whole heart by faith.

If you begin seeking God according to the Scriptures, at some point thereafter, you will begin to experience a fuller measure of God's Spirit. There are typical ways that the Spirit's filling manifests in us, but we do not always know how He will work. In the same way, we cannot precisely predict when we will experience more of His nearness. God's timing does not often match our own.

Jesus said that the Spirit and those led by Him are like wind. We don't always know when, how, or where He shows up (John 3:8). Today's session will highlight some of the ways that the Spirit comes when He is invited. Notice that each situation is different in its timing and its effect.

Proclaiming with Power

Read Acts 1:8. What did Jesus promise the disciples they would receive when the Holy Spirit comes? And what will the Spirit enable them to do?

A regular result of the Spirit's filling in the Old and New Testaments is speaking God's message.

Read 2 Peter 1:21. How does Peter describe the Spirit's role in those who speak for God?

As you seek God and He draws near to you, it's almost certain that you will become courageous to proclaim the word of God and the Gospel that Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

In 1806, a group of five students of Williams College met for prayer about taking the Gospel to lands yet unreached by Christian missionaries. Despite a passing thunderstorm, they earnestly prayed taking shelter under a haystack. That prayer meeting became the beginning of the Haystack Compact that instigated the whole modern American missions movement.⁹ Up to that point, world evangelization was almost nonexistent. But these students of no position or influence had a stirring in their hearts that would not be denied. They could no longer withhold their passion to share the message of Christ. Their zeal sparked a

9. J. Edwin Orr, *The Light of the Nations: Evangelical Renewal and Advance in the Nineteenth Century* (Milton Keynes, UK: Paternoster, 1965), 22.

missions movement that ultimately makes America the nation which has sent the most Christian missionaries around the world. It's amazing what the Spirit can do through us to spread the Gospel when we're filled with Him.

Gifts of the Spirit

The Holy Spirit gives each Christian a gift(s) that is intended to strengthen other Christians.

Look up Romans 12:3-8, 1 Corinthians 12:1-31 and 1 Peter 4:10-11. What gifts does the Holy Spirit give? How should the gifts be used?

Do you have an appreciation for the gifts of the Holy Spirit within you? What spiritual gifts would you say He has given you?

Fruit of the Spirit

Finally, personal fillings of the Spirit will lead to increased Christ-like character, or "fruit of the Spirit." The Spirit is God, so it is only natural that when He fills us we will become more like Him.

Read Galatians 5:22-23. List the fruit of the Spirit.

The fruit of the Spirit's fullness in our lives manifests itself in moral transformation. Love is the chief demonstration of the Spirit's work in us. In the midst of Paul's discussion about spiritual gifts, he emphasized that love surpasses the most amazing, miraculous work of the Spirit.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:1-3. How is love greater than any spiritual gift?

John also prioritized love and linked it to evidence that the Spirit's life abides in us. Read 1 John 4:7-8. According to John, what does love reveal about our relationship with God?

We ought not to think that we are “spiritual,” if we are not loving others the way that Jesus loved us. It has been and always will be a temptation to overemphasize one aspect of the Spirit’s work at the expense of the other. Some Christians may prefer to dwell on the miraculous gifts of the Spirit, while others favor the moral fruit of the Spirit. But we must appreciate and pursue both, as Paul encouraged the Corinthians:

1 Corinthians 14:1 Pursue love, and earnestly desire the spiritual gifts, especially that you may prophesy.

Have you personally experienced filling of the Spirit? Record your experience(s) that you could share with your Bible course.

Experiencing the Spirit's Filling as a Group

Experiencing the filling of the Spirit as an individual is wonderful, but the impact and joy that comes when God draws near to a group is incredible. The following account was written by a former Christian Union teaching fellow after a period of years when the Holy Spirit fell at Princeton University.

From 2008-2012 I was privileged to work with a ministry called Christian Union at Princeton University where we saw the Holy Spirit work in ways that I would have never thought possible. I could have believed it were possible in some distant country of missionary work or in the past of Church history. But I wasn't looking for works of God on this scale to happen in our land, in our era, and certainly not in my own life.

In a few short years, our ministry at a very secular university grew at such a pace that it became the largest student organization on campus of any kind. Weekly student involvement and new conversions doubled year after year. So many students' lives were forever changed as they encountered the tangible presence of God in corporate worship, small group prayer, personal prayer, conferences, and even as they slept. God was working in miraculous ways.

One of the official atheist representatives on the Religious Life Council became a follower of Jesus. Shockwaves rippled across the campus as it was reported that one of the captains of the football team went "God Squad." Student leaders of sports teams and social groups were starting Bible studies in their previously godless settings.

Students took public stands for their faith in hostile classrooms and in the student newspaper. Not only were undergraduates affected: one professor sought out a Christian student for prayer. This story that could have come from a missionary biography or the pages of the New Testament touched the churches in the area as well, spawning new prayer meetings among pastors and parishioners with renewed zeal to seek God.

Why did all this happen? Was it a spiritual fluke and we were "lucky" enough to be in the right place at the right time like coming across a \$20 bill on the ground? Was it solely a product of God's sovereign will without rhyme or reason?

Here's the simple yet profound truth of why God moved at Princeton:

James 4:8 Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you.

God makes it clear why He did what He did. God's greater work among us isn't random, it's a biblical principle. The only thing that stands between us and God's increased presence and power in our lives is our devotion to come closer to Him day after day.

Here's what I didn't mention yet about my time at Princeton, which preceded all these God-moments. It all started when the ministry instated a new practice: all ministry staff were going to begin praying two hours every workday, 9:00-11:00 a.m.

Before you say, "Two hours! I can't do that!" Simply hear the story, keep reading, and open up your heart.

The adjustment to praying two hours per day was a big one for most every one of us staff members. The new addition to our daily regimen came with questions, objections, and sometimes sour attitudes. But once we started experiencing God's overwhelming response, those hours holed up in a room simply to pray was more than worth it.

We can have more of God. Indeed, God wants to increase His intimacy and His work among us, but not apart from His prescribed promise. As believers, He waits on us to seek Him.¹⁰

There are tons of incredible stories of communities who have experienced the fullness of the Spirit, starting with the first church in Acts 2 and continuing to the present day. Sadly, most of today's most dynamic spiritual movements are happening in other parts of the world. However, America, and most of the nation's most influential universities have a privileged heritage of experiencing the outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Have you experienced the Spirit's filling in a corporate setting? If so, what took place?

There's nothing that can replace or replicate the joy, changed lives, intimacy with God, and kingdom advancement that comes when God draws nearer to us as a community of believers. The Spirit's increased presence doesn't mean that we will not have problems. In fact, spiritual revival and social rejection tend to go hand in hand to some extent or another. We should always have a realistic view of what happens when the Spirit comes. All the while, He will give us endurance and joy even in the midst of it.

10. Chuck Hetzler, *Raising Our Expectations of God*, unpublished.

Read Acts 19:1-41 as a biblical example of what happens when the Spirit moves in power on a community. Write down all of the results that followed the Spirit's corporate work in Ephesus, both good and bad.

God intends for us as His followers to be filled with His Spirit. We should not allow ourselves to settle for less than God's best. What do you think God is leading you to do to seek Him for the filling of His Spirit in your community?

Experiencing the Spirit's Filling as a Society

Amazingly, the filling of the Spirit can become so pervasive in a locale, that the society at large is transformed. This kind of national move of God has happened several times in America, two of which are known as the First and Second Great Awakenings. There have been many societal moves of God globally since the two American Great Awakenings. Many argue that we are far past due to have God move among us as a society again. We are in need of deep repentance, healing, and reorientation around our Creator. Recently, God drew near to the African nation of Uganda and the results have been remarkable.

Today, read and be inspired by God's drawing near to the nation of Uganda, and dream about what His drawing near again in America might look like. If you live in a different nation, seek Him for societal reformation in your nation. Note the undeniable connection between the people seeking and God drawing near.

The following is taken from the website of National Public Radio (NPR) from *All Things Considered* on January 1, 2004.¹¹ "Public health officials are hailing Uganda as a model for AIDS prevention. Rates of HIV infection among adults have dropped from a peak of 30 percent to 6 percent. Many credit President Yoweri Museveni for his emphasis on condom use; others credit religious groups for their message of abstinence and monogamy. NPR's Brenda Wilson reports."

In the early 1990's, the situation in Uganda was dire. HIV infection rates were above 30% and rising, and many thought AIDS would destroy an entire nation. Pastor John Mulinde and others knew it was time to seek the Lord with new diligence and fervency, because only God could bring about the change that was needed. God gave them a prophetic word, telling them not to focus their attention on AIDS, but to return to Him with their whole hearts and to call the nation to return to the Lord with all its heart, and He would so transform the HIV infection rate in the country that Uganda would become a model to the entire world. The whole world would come to Uganda to learn and marvel at how radically the country had changed. As the NPR report confirms, indeed the whole world has been amazed at what has happened in Uganda.

There had been Christians in Uganda for many years, but the church was sleepy, powerless, and ineffective. Christians attended church, but did not seek God wholeheartedly through fervent prayer and holy living. When the government closed down the churches in the 1970's, the Christians simply met in their homes instead of church buildings, but didn't seek God with any renewed fervor. Once police started

11. Brenda Wilson, "HIV Infection Rates Drop in Uganda," January 1, 2004, All Things Considered (NPR), <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1579818>.

coming into their homes, breaking up church and prayer meetings, the Christians in the country began to realize that they needed to seek God with new intensity and fervency. However, there was now no place to do it! The only place they could seek God undisturbed was in the swamps, so Christians would wade out into swamps, lift their hands and pray to God all night. Those who participated said you could hear other Christians in the swamps praying, such that it sounded like a continual buzzing because of all the voices of those crying out to the Lord all night.

Pastor John Mulinde and others radically changed their habits by having all the pastors in the city meet together every single day for prayer. Over the ensuing years, many thousands came to faith in Christ, and the HIV rate plummeted. Much of the transformation has been documented in a DVD put out by the Sentinel Group led by George Otis called *Transformations*.

The story of Uganda is not a unique one. There are many examples of God bringing massive societal good to a community when they turn to Him with their whole hearts. Another recent example is the Island Nation of Fiji, which is also documented by The Sentinel Group in a DVD titled *Let the Sea Resound*. Dan Knapke, former Director of Christian Union's ministry at Princeton, travelled with his wife Laurie to the Fiji islands in the summer of 2008 to see firsthand evidence of the astounding miracles that have happened in that nation. For years a man named Savi has led a group of twenty to thirty young men and women who call themselves the "Healing the Land Team." They pray and worship the Lord together every day from 4:30 am to 7:30 am and from 6:00 pm to 8:00 pm. Over the course of a year they typically engage in four 40-day fasts and keep a 24-hour prayer chain going continually around the clock, 7 days a week, 52 weeks a year. When a village invites them, they arrive and urge full lordship to Christ in all matters, and lead the Christians in renewed seeking after the Lord with whole hearts. The impact is nothing less than extraordinary. Suicide rates drop; alcoholism drops, divorce rates drop, and even fantastic miracles occur.

For example, a number of women in one village were looking out over the ocean and noticed a candlestick coming down out of the sky, and when it touched the water, lit the ocean on fire with 30-foot flames. After a while, the flames died down and the candlestick ascended back up into the sky. They went out to the area in the water where the flames had been and discovered that an entire coral reef that had been dead had come back to life! As astounding as this may sound, keep in mind that Dan and Laurie Knapke personally met and talked with the women who saw this amazing miracle, and even ate fish that was caught from the reef that had previously been dead. Truly, the "Healing the Land Team" sees the land healed.

Uganda and Fiji are contemporary examples of social change that comes when a community seeks the Lord wholeheartedly, and there are many other examples in American and European history. The anti-slavery movement in England and America was led by Christians and came out of context where there was renewed spiritual vitality in the land. Much of the prison reform and anti-poverty movements also came out of seasons of intense spiritual renewal. If you have a desire to see your community and nation changed for the better, there is no question that the best thing you can do is seek the Lord wholeheartedly and call on others to do the same.

Israel is God's chosen nation, but not necessarily his favorite one. God honored Israel incredibly by choosing them to receive the law through Moses, and to usher in the Savior of the world, Jesus Christ. How-

ever, God has plans and purposes for all nations including America. Is it fair to say that America also is a special nation, chosen by God for unique purposes? Absolutely, and the same can be said about Mexico, Canada, and every other nation on earth.

Read Jeremiah 18:5-10. What is God's right?

What basis determines whether a nation will persevere and fulfill its purposes?

Notice that the passage references ANY nation, not just Israel. This passage applies to the United States, Canada, Mexico and every nation on earth.

Nineveh, the capital of the Assyrian Empire in ancient times, was in danger of destruction because of its wickedness. God appointed Jonah, a reluctant prophet at best, to visit the nation and tell them the news.

Read Jonah 3:1-10. Why did God relent in bringing destruction?

Have you ever considered that America as a nation (or your home country) has a unique destiny and purpose established by God?

What do you think that destiny is?

You read the Jeremiah passage about how some nations fulfill their purposes and others fail. How would you rate, on a scale of 1 to 10, America's (or your country's) current course of fulfilling its destiny, with 1 meaning not at all and 10 meaning the country is on track?

What is the basis for your ranking?

Christian Union Day and Night brings together Christians across America to seek God for the greatest filling of the Spirit that our nation has ever seen. If you have not already, please consider joining the movement at DayandNight.org.

LESSON THREE

Seeking God Lifestyle, Principles 1-3

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” Matthew 7:24

From this point of the manual, we make a turn from theory to practice, from why to how. Like a coach helping an aspiring athlete reach his potential, these principles and their application are for your instruction and implementation as you live a life of seeking God wholeheartedly.

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LESSON THREE, DAY ONE

A Lifestyle of Seeking God and its Seven Principles

Seeking the face of God is the process of drawing close to God, and therefore attracting His presence to your life and community. It’s hard work that takes time and effort like anything else worthy of pursuit in this life. Becoming a Christian is only the first step, and without diligently applying yourself, you will never draw close to the Lord or experience His presence and power in your life. But like anything in your life worth pursuing, the benefit far outweighs the effort.

Seeking God means discovering what He loves and values, and connecting with Him to have those same values permeate your heart. It’s about knowing the heart of God, identifying with Him and carrying out His purposes. As you seek Him, He responds to you and comes upon your life in power so that you may fulfill your destiny and so that you and your community would be blessed. You should know that it’s costly to seek the Lord wholeheartedly. Not only does it take a lot of time and effort, but it means taking into your life God’s plans and purposes. It’s disruptive and puts Him as Lord of your life instead of yourself.

Yet, the process of seeking and finding God will become your greatest delight if you persist in it.

Seeking God is not a solitary or convenient activity that we can add to our busy lifestyles. Rather, seeking God must become our lifestyle. Living to draw closer to God should be the framework for our lives, and all other activities must be subordinated to it—to Him.

Read James 4:1-10. What effort and lifestyle change were needed for these Christians to draw near to God so that He would draw near to them?

We Seek God through a variety of actions and attitudes of the heart. We've already read about many of those actions and attitudes which were put into practice by those who have found God in the Scriptures and Church history. For the sake of ease, we have put these practices of seeking God into seven categories or principles. One could divide the various aspects of seeking God in many different ways. This list of seven principles is not the only way to conceive of drawing near to God on a regular basis, but it is a helpful way to think about how we can come closer to God with intentionality and a whole heart.

Here is a list of the seven principles. You will learn more each of these principles over the course of the rest of this Bible Course manual.

Principle 1: Humility with Fasting

Principle 2: Fervent and Frequent Prayer

Principle 3: Taking in the Word

Principle 4: Repentance

Principle 5: Obedience

Principle 6: Perseverance

Principle 7: Gathering of/with Others

Remember that the Spirit comes to us as we come closer to Him. Employing these principles sets that spiritual process in motion. The seven principles of a Seeking God Lifestyle are opportunities for you to experience the fullness of life that God has made available through faith in Jesus Christ.

God created you for a unique and specific purpose, which can only be fulfilled if you seek Him wholeheartedly. There are examples of many in the Scriptures who fulfilled their destiny, and examples of those who filled them only partially or not at all. Though he committed a few grievous sins, King David sought God wholeheartedly and fulfilled God's purposes for him (Acts 13:36). Others include Abraham, Joseph, Esther, Ruth, Daniel, and Nehemiah. Some, however, only sought God partially and therefore only partially fulfilled their destiny, including Samson, King Saul, King Solomon and others. Of course, there are those who came nowhere near to what God would have desired for them, including King Ahab and Queen Jezebel. What will your life be like? The choice of whether you step into all God has for you is up to you.

Read Hebrews 11:1-12:2. How do these stories instruct and inspire you to seek God earnestly? Which example of faith resonates most with you?

Even though you don't yet know the details of these seven principles of seeking God, what are your feelings thus far? Are you excited, afraid, unsure, or simply waiting to find out more? If you have any sense of fear or anxiety about adopting a lifestyle of seeking God, take time to slowly talk through your reasons with the Lord. Ask Him what He wants to tell you about your concerns.

Make a record of your thoughts and interactions below.

Principle 1: Humility with Fasting

Humility before God means that we honor Him as God and that we submit to Him as His creatures and His children. God alone rules the universe, and strongly opposes all who seek to usurp His role. It was because of pride, the desire to be like the Most High, that Satan was thrown out of heaven (Isaiah 14:12-20). Peter makes plain God's opposition to the arrogant: "God opposes the proud, but shows favor to the humble" (1 Peter 5:5). Arrogance is repellent to God even in his children and He doesn't want anything to do with it. Pride repulses God, and just as powerfully, humility delights Him and attracts His presence.

Two of the predominant scriptural passages we have referenced so far—James 4:1-10 and 2 Chronicles 7:13-14—include the principle of humbling oneself in seeking God.

Read James 4:6-10. What happens when you submit to God?

What does God do when you humble yourself before Him?

Read Isaiah 57:15. What does God do for the humble?

Read Isaiah 66:1-2. What happens to those who are humble?

No matter how long we may have been Christians, we are to intentionally cultivate humility before God. Sometimes Christians will pray, "Lord, humble me," yet there is no example in the Bible of believers praying this prayer. Repeatedly in the Bible, God commands His people to humble themselves. Humbling ourselves is something God wants us to do, not something God does on our behalf. Fasting, though infrequently practiced today, is one of the key physical activities that we can undertake to foster humility in our hearts. Psalm 35:13 (NIV) says, "I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting."

In the next section, we will explain more specifically what fasting entails and how we can practice it for the sake of humbling ourselves and drawing closer to the Lord.

Fasting

Tragically, fasting has fallen out of fashion in the Western church, removing its God-appointed role to help Christians attract the presence of God. Fasting isn't everything, of course, but it's an important part of the Christian life that should be a regular part of the life of a man or woman seeking God. These principles of seeking God have nothing to do with our salvation or earning a certain standing before God. Salvation comes only as a free gift by grace through faith in Jesus Christ.

Countless devout men and women in the Scriptures humbled themselves before God through fasting. Moses fasted 40 days twice; Elijah fasted 40 days; Nehemiah fasted 120 days; Mordecai, Esther and thousands of Jews in the Persian Empire fasted 70 days, and some went without both food and water for three days of that fast; Ezra fasted; John the Baptist fasted; Anna the prophetess fasted; the Apostles and first elders fasted, and so did Christians in the first-century church.

The Greek and Hebrew words for *fasting* means to go without food for a certain time period, and perhaps liquids also, to humble oneself before God. It is sometimes accompanied by mourning and grieving. When fasting is mentioned in the Bible, it usually meant going without food during the day and perhaps a meal in evening, unless the Scriptures specifically say otherwise. For instance, Moses' fast was without food or water—a supernatural fast that should only be undertaken if a person has received a direct revelation from God.

In our zeal to fast, we need to make sure we do not do anything potential harmful to our bodies. For example, fasting by drinking only water for 40 days could kill a person, and this was Lou Engle's concern when he sensed God calling him to that sort of fast. Lou Engle is founder of a ministry called The Call as well as Justice House of Prayer (pronounced J-Hop). Several years ago, he felt God urging him to fast for 40 days with water only, but prayed to God explaining that he was afraid he would die if he fasted that way. In the midst of this struggle, he happened to be travelling from where he lived in northern California to southern California. He walked into a church and a woman approached him and said, "God showed me your face in a dream and he wants you to do a water-only fast." Engle was stunned and felt that perhaps this sort of supernatural confirmation was the sign he was waiting for. And then the woman added, "And God also wants you to know that you will not die from this fast." So, Engle went on a 40-day water-only fast and his health was fine. Any person who seeks to go on a fast of such length and severity should only do so if there is this sort of supernatural revelation and confirmation.

Many Christians around the world fast regularly, and so did many in church history. We know from a first-century document called the *Didache* that Christians in the first century regularly fasted Wednesdays and Fridays until dinner. John Wesley, the founder of Methodism in the 18th century, believed in the

necessity of fasting so strongly that he would not ordain anyone to ministry who did not fast Wednesdays and Fridays.

The first-century Christians fasted because Jesus expected them to fast. **Read Matthew 6:1-18** and **Matthew 9:14-15**. How would you summarize Jesus' instruction with regards to fasting?

Fasting ought to be a regular part of the Christian life, even though exceptional for 21st century American Christians. To some Christians today, fasting sounds harsh, demanding, and unnecessary, but it is a basic Biblical idea that brings wonderful benefits. Pastor and third President of Princeton University, Jonathan Edwards (1703-58), made the following statement regarding the standard of fasting for the Christian.

One thing more I would mention concerning fasting and prayer, wherein I think there has been a neglect in ministers; and that is that although they recommend and much insist on the duty of secret prayer, in their preaching; so little is said about secret fasting. It is a duty recommended by our Savior to his followers, just in like manner as secret prayer is; as may be seen by comparing the 5th and 6th vss. of the 6th chap. of Matt. with vss. 16-18. Though I don't suppose that secret fasting is to be practiced in a stated manner and steady course as secret prayer, yet it seems to me 'tis a duty that all professing Christians should practice, and frequently practice. There are many occasions of both a spiritual and temporal nature that do properly require it; and there are many particular mercies that we desire for ourselves or friends that it would be proper, in this manner, to seek of God.¹²

Read Acts 13:2-3. The apostles and leaders fasted and prayed. What happened when they did this?

Wicked King Ahab and Queen Jezebel ruled Israel for a season. Together they conspired to murder a man in cold blood to steal his vineyard, so God sent Elijah to pronounce judgment on them.

Read 1 Kings 21:20-29. Focusing on verses 27-29, what did Ahab's fasting and humbling of himself bring about?

12. *Some Thoughts concerning the Revival*, in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, Vol. 4 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 521.

That King Ahab should escape judgment even though he was such a wicked man shows the power of fasting and humility, and highlights the mercy and kindness of a loving and forgiving God.

Of course, fasting is not a panacea, because a person can be very proud even though he fasts. This was the problem of the Pharisees. They fasted regularly, as they should have, but were still proud and self-righteous. If a person is determined to be arrogant, fasting will not help him, but for the man or woman truly seeking to humble himself before the Lord, fasting is an important and necessary part of the Christian life.

In addition to its regular role in our lives, fasting is an important way to seek God in special times of need. Mordecai and Queen Esther served in the court of the Persian King Xerxes in the fifth century B.C. and discovered a decree issued through the influence of a wicked counselor to the king named Haman that gave the enemies of the Jews throughout the empire the right to kill them and steal their property with impunity. This news greatly alarmed Esther, who was Jewish herself, but she was afraid to approach the king, because even walking into his presence without being invited was grounds for execution unless the King extended mercy.

Read Esther 4:15-17. How long did all those in Susa fast?

Why do you think they fasted?

The Lord heard the cries of the Jews through their prayers and fasting and rescued them. Esther and Mordecai took heroic action to confront Haman and had delivered the Jews in Persia.

Ezra was a priest who led a large group of Jews in 458 BC from Persia back to Jerusalem, a 1000-mile journey. In His covenant to Israel, God never promised that all such journeys of Israelites would be completely safe. However, Ezra knew that God responds to those seeking Him, so Ezra gave leadership to the people.

Read Ezra 8:21-23. Ezra boldly told the King of Persia that God's blessing is for whom?

And God's wrath is for whom?

God gave Ezra safe passage because he sought Him. If Ezra had not sought the Lord and had been attacked and killed on his journey, history would have been very different and Ezra would not have fulfilled God's destiny for him to help rebuild the temple.

As you consider your own life, the state of your community, the condition of our nation, and of the world, what circumstances call for a special occasion of fasting so that you can fill your own destiny?

Consider again Edwards' Biblical deduction and his encouragement to fast for specific purposes.

The state of the times extremely requires a fullness of the divine Spirit in ministers, and we ought to give ourselves no rest till we have obtained it. And in order to [do] this, I should think ministers, above all persons, ought to be much in secret prayer and fasting, and also much in praying and fasting one with another. It seems to me it would be becoming the circumstances of the present day, if ministers in a neighborhood would often meet together and spend days in fasting and fervent prayer among themselves, earnestly seeking for those extraordinary supplies of divine grace from heaven, that we need at this day.¹³

Fasting helps develop humility and a longing after God because the lack of food causes you to recognize your humanity and need for God for everything in life. When Jesus taught about fasting, He emphasized that our physical hunger is an expression of our spiritual hunger to have His immediate presence in our lives (Mark 2:18-22). We are seeking His nearness when we fast.

As our hunger increases, fasting helps increase fervency in prayer, which has a powerful impact on God.

It's important to keep in mind, of course, that God cannot be controlled by any human being and nothing is automatic. God is not obligated to answer your prayer just because you fast. However, the Scriptures teach that fasting and humility sway God and incline Him to draw near when otherwise He might not have. He has made clear to humanity what delights Him and under what circumstances He is likely to draw near.

PUTTING FASTING INTO PRACTICE:

CHRISTIANS CAN FAST IN TWO WAYS: REGULARLY AND EPISODICALLY

Regularly

As a way of life, Christians can fast regularly unless unable to do so for medical reasons. As noted earlier, Christians fasted every Wednesday and Friday until dinner as a way of life in the first century. Think about how many days per week or month you would like to fast on a regular basis. This regular practice will develop humility, strengthen your spiritual life and attract God's presence to your life.

Episodically

Secondly, seasons arise that call for longer, and possibly more intense fasts. Nehemiah fasted for many days (Nehemiah 1:1-4) when he learned that the wall around Jerusalem was destroyed. Ezra and a large number of people fasted for three days for safe travel from Persia back to Jerusalem. Are there currently circumstances in your own life or in 21st century America that warrant extended fasting?

13. Ibid., 507.

Principle 2: Frequent and Fervent Prayer

It is difficult to overestimate the power of fervent and frequent prayer. Because God is all-powerful, talking with Him and asking Him to intervene on your behalf changes your environment like nothing else. He is not our genie and will not obey our commands, but He does love us and has promised to be interested and responsive to our prayers. He is free to do whatever He decides, yet His heart is moved by our entreaties. Prayer gives a person enormous influence with God and the Christian neglects it to his own peril.

Nehemiah, as a prominent court official of Persia in the 5th century B.C., lived in the capital city of Susa, 1,000 miles away from Jerusalem. When he heard the news about Jerusalem's walls, he responded with deep and agonizing prayer.

Read Nehemiah chapter 1. What in the passage points to the fervency of Nehemiah's prayers?

He began praying in the month of Kislev, which is the 9th month in the Hebrew calendar. (The Hebrew calendar has 12 months with 30 days per month.) He ended in the month of Nisan, the first month of the year. So how many days did he pray day and night?

Have you ever agonized over something that was important to God the way Nehemiah did?

His prayers were potent! The wall was rebuilt in only 53 days, which is less than half the number of days during which he prayed so fervently.

Sometimes Christians don't pray because they "run out of things to pray about." **Read Ephesians 6:18.** This verse gives us an endless source of prayer material. What would it look like for you to pray to God with all kinds of requests, praying for all your Christian friends and family members?

Prayer is built on faith. One of the reasons we don't pray as much as we should is because our faith is low and we don't think it will make a difference.

Read Luke 11:5-13 and Luke 18:1-8. Write down all the references to frequent, fervent prayer. Write down every reference to faith, not just the word “faith,” but the idea that God will respond when we pray.

In the Lesson 4, you will learn more about how to put this principle of frequent, fervent prayer into practice.

Principle 3: Constant and Large Intake of the Word of God

Many Christians in America seek to know God's will to walk in obedience to Him, but their minds have so little of the Scriptures in them that they don't know God's heart and priorities. There is no substitute for diligently studying the Scriptures. Our predecessors put the average educated American Christian to shame. For instance, Ashbel Green, president of Princeton University in the early 1800's, noticed such godlessness among the student body that he instituted the requirement that students memorize five chapters of the Bible *per week*.¹⁴ As expected, lives were dramatically transformed and revival broke out on campus.

Similarly, you may be familiar with the amazing story of St. Patrick, who was captured as a boy from England and served as a slave on the island of Ireland before escaping and later returning to evangelize the entire nation. While a shepherd in slavery, he recited from memory 50 Psalms every morning and 50 Psalms every night, covering the entire book twice every three days. Is there any wonder he was incredibly used of God to evangelize an entire nation of violent, idolatrous pagans?

Recent sociological research confirms anecdotal observation. The American Bible Study's commissioned study showed that unless a person reads the Bible a minimum of four times per week, his life is no different from the non-Christian living next door. Reading the Bible four times per week or more is needed to produce *any difference at all*. To achieve the level of godliness that God expects, of course, much more study and reading of the Bible is needed than just four times per week. Take note of the conclusions of The Center for Bible Engagement:

Consistent with the findings from our previous studies, we also find that there are no statistically significant differences between those who read or listen to the Bible one to three times a week and those who spent zero days doing so. In other words, for adults, engaging scripture for less than four days a week does not appear to have the same protective factor as doing so for four or more days.¹⁵

14. Kenneth P. Jasko, "Religion and Revival at Princeton University" (Senior thesis, Princeton University, 1978).

15. Arnold Cole and Pamela Caudill Ovwigho, "Understanding the Bible Engagement Challenge: Scientific Evidence for the Power of 4" (Center for Bible Engagement, December 2009), 13.

The Scriptures are incredibly powerful, and even the Scriptures themselves attest to their value and power. Because there are 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, the author of Psalm 119 composed a poem of 22 stanzas (one for each Hebrew letter) with 8 verses per stanza, each one starting with the same letter of the alphabet. Twenty-two letters multiplied by 8 equals 176 verses in the Psalm, constituting the longest chapter in the Bible. The Psalmist constructed his poem so that both its form and content celebrate the word of God.

From the following verses in **Psalm 119**, list characteristics of the word of God and those who delight in His word:

Verses 2-3

Verses 9-11

Verse 24

Verse 34

Verse 60

Verses 71, 72

Verse 89

Verse 103

Verse 128

Verse 152

Verse 176

Wilberforce, the famous Member of Parliament and member of the “Clapham Sect” who labored for 40 years to outlaw the slave trade and emancipate the slaves in the British Empire, valued the Scriptures so highly that he regularly recited the entirety of Psalm 119 from memory on his walks home from Parliament. It is no coincidence that one of history’s greatest social reformers knew the Bible incredibly well.

Presently, how highly do you value the Scriptures?

The great 19th century English preacher Charles Spurgeon famously remarked: “I have ten men willing to die for the Bible for every one man willing to actually read it.”

Next week’s lesson will provide very specific application for Principles 2-3.

LESSON FOUR

Seeking God Lifestyle, Principles 4-5

“And will not God give justice to his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them?”

Luke 18:7

Lesson 4 finishes Principles 2-3 by providing specific application for praying and absorbing God’s word as a lifestyle.

Principles 4-5 are then introduced and explained with specific actions suggested. Remember as you read this week’s lesson the theological foundation of the first two lessons. These principles are like open doors that you can walk through to experience the fullness of life with God’s Holy Spirit.

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LESSON FOUR, DAY ONE

Devotions Two to Three Set Times per Day

You may be familiar with the story of Daniel, the right-hand man to kings of Babylon and Persia. He was in a position of extraordinary governmental and cultural influence, and as a devout seeker after God, refused to eat food sacrificed to idols, refused to bow down to a golden image of Nebuchadnezzar, and prayed to God three times per day even when it meant being thrown into a lions’ den (Daniel 6:10). Several years ago, a collection of devout Christian teachers, who regularly teach and minister to students who are on a trajectory of powerful influence, were asked a question concerning the standard of Christian devotion.

They were asked, “If a student approached you and said to you the following, what would you say?”

The hypothetical student asks, “I am a sophomore and am doing well academically and with extracurricular activities and believe that I am probably on a course, if everything goes well, to be in a culturally

influential position like Daniel. I want to know, based on your own life, the lives of those you've taught through the years, your knowledge of the Scriptures, and your study of Christian heroes and heroines in church history, how much time I should spend each day total, either on my own or with others, reading the Bible and praying. I understand that this can vary somewhat, and also want to know what you think is needed, not what you think is feasible based on my other commitments. Just as if I were to go into a coach's office here on campus and ask him how much time, based on his experience, he thinks I would need to practice and condition myself to be a contributing force on the athletic team, and he would no doubt answer, I want to know what time is needed to be a spiritual Daniel. Simply based on your expertise, how much time do you think is needed?"

How would you answer such a question? The audience asked was a collection of Christian Union Ministry Fellows, and while there was some variance, the minimum was two hours per day of Bible reading (and by "reading" what is meant is reading, memorizing, reciting, studying, meditating and even listening to Biblical sermons, i.e. Biblical intake in all its possible forms), and prayer (including private or group prayer and worship). This is what they believed to be the minimum amount of time needed for a Christian to be as spiritually strong as Daniel.

The question that arises is: Do you think this is true? And if so, do you value Daniel's level of godliness so much that you are interested in devoting that much time to draw near to God? Many people value education, but are unwilling to spend the tens of thousands of dollars and 9 months per year for 4 years to get a college education (only approximately 25% of U.S. adults are college-educated). Others value athletics, but not everyone values athletics enough to spend two to four hours daily year-round needed to be at a competitive level. If you want your life to reflect the spiritual power, adventure, and godliness of the Biblical role models, then you deserve to know what it takes to get there. Some are disappointed in the strength of their spiritual lives, but often have never learned that more time may be needed to seek the Lord to be as strong as they wish. A person, for a variety of reasons, may choose to only spend 15 minutes daily conditioning himself for an athletic team, but at least there would be no doubt why he didn't succeed.

The amount of daily devotional time is important, and so is the frequency. The pattern practiced in the first century by pious Jews and Christians was to seek God through prayer and bible reading two or three set times per day (throughout this study, "Bible reading" refers not just reading the Bible but for hearing it, studying it, memorizing it, reciting it, and meditating on it). These set times usually lasted from 30 minutes to 1.5 hours in length. Gatherings on Sabbath days usually lasted longer, more in the two- to three-hour range.

It's important to pause and make a distinction between praying and Bible reading at multiple set times per day versus praying continually throughout the day. Both of these practices are taught by the Scriptures and modeled by the godly, but one does not preclude the other. Some have concluded that spontaneous prayers throughout the day meets the Biblical example of multiple daily devotions, but this is not the case. First Thessalonians 5:17 urges Christians to "pray continually," probably in the sense of lifting up prayers throughout the day, but as seen later in this lesson, there are other passages that point to discreet, set times of Bible reading and prayer during each day.

Scholars believe first-century pious Jews adopted the practice of two or three set times per day of prayer and Bible reading from the Old Testament Scriptures. For the following passages, comment on whether

the emphasis is more on prayer or more on the Word of God, and write how many times daily the passage suggests to pray or read the Bible.

Read Deuteronomy 6:4-6

Read Joshua 1: 8, 9

Read Psalm 1:1-2

Read Psalm 55:17

Read Daniel 6:10

First century Christians gathered to pray customarily at 9am, noon, and 3pm because of time-keeping practices in the Roman Empire. In many cities officials rang bells in the town center three times daily so that inhabitants could mark their days and arrange meetings. At the Jewish Temple in Jerusalem, the daily burnt offerings in the morning and (customarily) at twilight were set to coincide with these times so that the morning offering was at 9am and the evening offering at 3pm. During these times Jews, and subsequently, Christians would gather to pray (see e.g., those praying while Zechariah was in the temple as recorded in Luke 1:8-10).

Several scholars attest to the regularity of the daily devotions of first-century Christians:

Although the point is not explicitly stated, there is reason to think that the apostles and their converts were faithful not only to the prayer of the ninth hour [3 pm] but to all three of the moments for daily prayer among the Jews. The *Didache* (a document not easy to date but which may be very close in time to the first generations of Christians) formally prescribes that the faithful pray three times a day, although it replaces the Jewish formulas with the Our Father.¹⁶

Scholar Robert Taft also notes:

Christians, like Jews, adopted the custom of praying at fixed times, and that the most important times for public liturgical prayer in common in both traditions were the beginning and end of the day.¹⁷

16. A.G. Martimort, I.H. Dalmais, and P. Jounel, *The Liturgy and Time, vol. 4 of The Church at Prayer* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1986), 162-3.

17. Robert F. Taft, *The Liturgy of the Hours in East and West* (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1986), 11.

New Testament Examples for Twice Daily Devotionals

Understanding the practice of pious Jews and Christians in the first century is extremely helpful, not only because knowing the practices of Christians from any age helps inform our own lives, but more importantly because first century history provides the context for interpreting the New Testament. Scholars tell us that pious Jews and subsequently Christians participated in devotions two or three set times per day for a total of about one and a half to three hours.

THREE BIBLICAL COMMANDS

First: Luke 18:1-8

Read Luke 18:1-8. Jesus tells a parable to show how His followers should pray. Notice verse 7. Given the practice in the first century among pious Jews and Christians, what pattern of prayer do you think He is teaching His followers?

Notice verse 8. The real question is not whether Jesus will hear your prayers if you pray with this level of fervency and frequency, but whether you will have the faith to persevere in prayer.

Second: First Timothy 5: 5, 6

In 1 Timothy 5:2-16 the apostle Paul prescribes the conditions for financially helping widows. To receive financial help from the church, they need to (1) have no children or grandchildren who can take care of them (v.4), (2) be at least 60 years old (v.9), (3) have been faithful to their husbands (v.9), and (4) have a reputation for good works including looking after children and helping the afflicted (v.10). However, there are additional conditions.

Read 1 Timothy 5:5, 6. What else is expected of them as they put their hope in God?

If they did not practice this, what is their spiritual condition according to v.6?

If a widow is considered “self indulgent” (ESV) or a “lover of pleasure” (NIV), dead while she’s alive, and therefore unworthy of financial assistance if she does not pray night and day, is it fair to assume that this is God’s expectation of Christians today? Why or why not?

Third: Hebrews 13:9-15

The book of Hebrews is written to Jewish Christians (probably in Italy) undergoing persecution and therefore at risk of slipping back into Judaism, an approved and non-persecuted religion in the Roman Empire at the time. Throughout the book, the author compares the Old Covenant (Judaism) to the New Covenant, explaining why the readers cannot return to Judaism, but must stay loyal to Jesus Christ, even when it means persecution. There are numerous analogies in the book, describing the ancient practices of Israel and how they have been fulfilled in Jesus Christ.

Read Hebrews 13:9-15. Notice verse 15, “let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise.” The readers, as Jewish Christians, would understand the metaphor as a reference to the morning and evening regular burnt offerings at the Jewish temple in Jerusalem. The same Greek phraseology (in the Septuagint) is used multiple times in Numbers 28 and 29 to describe the twice daily offerings. The context and grammatical similarity suggest that God intends His people to set aside time to praise Him morning and evening.

EXAMPLES

Moving from New Testament commands regarding multiple daily devotions, we now focus on New Testament examples.

In the first century, Jews married young, around at the age of 14, which we can probably assume is the age when the prophetess Anna married her husband. He died after seven years, and from that time forward she devoted her life to continually worshipping God.

Read Luke 2:36-38. How many years did she spend continually worshipping God, fasting night and day?

Arguably, the Scriptures teach that Christians should pray and read the Scriptures two or three set times per day, but not all Christians are called to live the lifestyle of Anna. It’s fair to say, however, that since she was recognized as a godly woman, every culture of Christians should have “Anna’s” in them. Where are the Anna’s in America? There are men and women who live this sort of lifestyle in other Christian cultures, including those in China, Korea, and Africa, but there are so few in American or European Christianity. Why do you think that is?

Professor of Liturgy at Notre Dame University, Paul Bradshaw, documented the prayer practices of the first-century church, drawing from extra Biblical sources as well as the New Testament itself:

Alongside the twofold recitation of the *Shema* we find in Rabbinic Judaism the quite different custom of praying three times a day—morning, afternoon, and evening, the first and last being in practice combined with the saying of the *Shema*. The observance of the afternoon time of prayer is mentioned in the New Testament: Peter and John go up to the Temple ‘at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour’ [3 pm] (Acts 3:1), and Cornelius the centurion keeps the night hour of prayer in his house [3pm] (Acts 10.3, 30). The ninth hour, 3 p.m., appears to have been chosen for the afternoon prayer in order that it might coincide with the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice in the Herodian Temple.¹⁸

Read 2 Timothy 1:3. How often was Timothy remembered in Paul’s prayers?

Read 1 Thessalonians 3:10, and 1 Thessalonians 1:1. Who was participating in continuous, night and day prayer?

HISTORICAL EXAMPLES

If God desires for His people to pray with such frequency, then we would expect to see historically that when Christians sought the Lord according to such a disciplined pattern that God would respond powerfully. Though many examples could be cited, the Moravians and the Clapham group illustrate what diligent prayer produces.

Moravians

The Moravians were a community of Christians from an area what is now known as the Czech Republic. Because of persecution, they sought refuge in Saxony on land belonging to a man named Count Nicholas von Zinzendorf. They established what they called “Hernhut” or the “Lord’s Watch”. In 1727 they were inspired to begin a 24-hour prayer chain of 24 men and 24 women praying one hour each on alternating days. The remarkable feature of this prayer chain was its longevity—lasting over 100 years!

Two Biblical passages in particular inspired them. The first was Isaiah 62:6, 7: “I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem, and makes her the praise of the earth.” The second passage was Leviticus 6:12, 13: “The fire on the altar shall be kept burning on it; it shall not go out. The priest shall burn wood on it every morning, and he shall arrange the burnt offering on it and shall burn on it the fat of the peace offerings. Fire shall be kept burning on the altar continually; it shall not go out.”

18. Paul Bradshaw, *Daily Prayer in the Early Church: A Study of the Origin and Early Development of the Divine Office* (Eugene, OR: Wipf& Stock, 2008), 2.

The spiritual power amongst this small band of Christians was so great that they sent out more missionaries in 20 years than all of Protestantism had sent in the previous 200 years. Their influence on John and Charles Wesley of the Methodist movement, George Fox of the Quakers and many other Christians is well documented.

The Clapham Group

Clapham was a neighborhood near the Parliament building in London at the turn of the 19th century, where a group of powerful, influential, and devout Christians lived. The group became known as the “Clapham Group” and gave leadership to abolish the trans-Atlantic slave trade. Church historian G. R. Balleine gives a short description of this group of Christian friends in his book, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England*:

But little did the critics guess the almost monastic self-discipline by which these well-to-do Christians ordered each day of their lives. They moved in Society, they were given to hospitality, because they believed it a duty. “My business is in the world,” wrote Wilberforce, “and I must mix in the assemblies of men, or quit the part which Providence seems to have assigned to me” but every temptation to self-indulgence was rigidly held in check. Like all Evangelicals in those days, they were very early risers, for they realized intensely the value of time. Every hour was mapped out beforehand; some of Wilberforce’s timetables were discovered after his death—so many hours for prayer, so many for study, so many for business, so many for rest, and a column at the end in which to enter all the time that had been squandered. *They made a point of setting apart three hours a day for prayer—from five to six in the morning, from twelve to one at noon, and from five to six in the evening.*¹⁹

This small group of Christians led by William Wilberforce persevered in outlawing the Trans-Atlantic slave trade in the British Empire and emancipating the slaves. The spiritual strength to persevere in this heroic undertaking came from God through their diligent efforts in seeking Him day and night.

CONTEMPORARY EXAMPLES

If God intends for Christians to seek Him with such fervency and regularity in prayer, then we would expect to see in the world today examples God’s blessings when Christians seek Him this way.

Korea

Dr. David Cho is pastor of the largest church in the world, Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, Korea with 800,000 members. He is unambiguous about the source of his church’s growth: frequent, fervent prayer and fasting. Since the 1970’s the church has maintained a facility they call “prayer mountain,” hosting thousands of worshippers around the clock, 24 hours a day, seeking God. The crowd rarely falls below 3,000 and sometimes exceeds 10,000, consisting of eager Christians seeking the face of God in fervent prayer night and day, 24 hours a day, every day of the year. Dr. Cho personally spends two to four hours total every day in prayer spread out over morning, afternoon and evening.

19. G. R. Balleine, *A History of the Evangelical Party in the Church of England* (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908), 148-9 [emphasis added].

Ethiopia

As of 2010, the country of Ethiopia had ten Cru (formerly known as Campus Crusade for Christ) staff workers ministering on campuses with over 30,000 students involved. The director of the ministry said recently to his ministry colleagues from other countries, “the secret is fasting and prayer.”²⁰

20. Conversation between the author and Mark Gauthier, National Director, Campus Crusade for Christ, December 13, 2010.

Principle 4: Repentance and Principle 5: Obedience

A person can fast, pray, and study the Bible, but without true heart repentance and lifestyle obedience, God considers these pious acts nothing more than empty gestures. Jesus condemned the Pharisees for living this way, and we need to learn from their mistakes. Thankfully, the American church largely acknowledges that God expects a sincere righteous lifestyle. We need to repent and obey God *and* we need to humble ourselves, fast, pray, and read the Scriptures.

Repentance is the act of changing your mind about what is acceptable, acknowledging an attitude or action as wrong and unacceptable to God that you previously had thought was acceptable, or perhaps had not even thought about at all. Obedience is the natural companion to repentance, because it is the ongoing change of behavior that accompanies a new perspective on what is right and what is wrong. A woman repents of her gossip when she acknowledges the wrongfulness of her actions and lives an obedient life as she refrains from gossip and instead speaks well of people. A man repents of his laziness when he acknowledges that he has not been working diligently, and lives an obedient life as he faithfully works hard from that point forward. True repentance is followed by faithful obedience, and true obedience is preceded by repentance. There is a sure-fire way to tell if repentance is genuine in a person: by observing his subsequent behavior. If obedience follows, then the repentance was most likely genuine.

There are exceptions to the above explanation of repentance and obedience that need to be kept in mind. Sometimes a Christian or non-Christian has a stronghold in their lives of such strength that they commit the same type of sin repeatedly even though they genuinely repent of it. This reflects deeper spiritual issues that cannot be adequately addressed in this lesson. There could be demonic problems, or lack of the Spirit's power from a lack of seeking Him, or other issues beyond the scope of this lesson. Secondly, it should also be realized that as a fallen human being, you will be confessing sins your whole life, including ones of which you have genuinely repented in the past. You shouldn't get the false impression that once you've sincerely repented of a sin you will never commit it again.

Repenting of your sins means acknowledging Jesus Christ as truly Lord of all. As the expression goes, if He's not Lord *of* all, then He's not Lord *at* all. The Christian must surrender to the lordship of Christ in all matters.

Read the following passage on the hypocrisy of outward demonstrations of religion without true repentance and obedience.

Read Isaiah 58:1-12. Why was God angry with Israel even though they prayed, fasted, and “humbled” themselves?

List the specific sins of Israel.

Read **1 Peter 3:7, 4:7** and **Psalm 66:18**. What can make our prayers ineffective?

Again, it’s worth repeating that the solution to the sins of Isaiah 58:1-12, 1 Peter 3:7, 4:7 and Psalm 66:18 is not to stop or minimize praying, fasting, or humbling oneself! The solution is to genuinely repent individually and corporately of offences against God, and to change behavior to match.

Repenting is inherent to seeking God wholeheartedly. Psalm 78 recounts the many times from the exodus until the time of David that Israel rebelled against God, yet He forgave them repeatedly when they repented and sought Him wholeheartedly.

Read Psalm 78:32-34. What did God have to do so that the people would seek Him in repentance?

The judgment of God is real and comes upon individuals, families, and nations when they rebel against Him; however, complete justice is not meted out until the resurrection of the dead. Some mistakenly interpret passages like this to mean that it is good that judgment comes because that means humanity will repent. However, there are many instances when judgment came and the people did not repent. For example, after all the judgments Israel suffered, they still rejected the Messiah when He came. Other nations, such as the Hittites and other Canaanite nations, were completely exterminated because of their wickedness.

Read 2 Chronicles 34:1-7. When Josiah became king, he turned to God and sought Him with his whole heart. He was very thorough in the destruction of idols and altars to false gods. List all the verbs of the actions he took to destroy the false worship.

It is important that you do the same in your own life. Anything dishonoring to the Lord must be thoroughly removed so that there is no hindrance between you and God.

What are some things that God may be telling you to change in your life or remove from your life so that you can fully devote yourself to Him?

Repentance and Obedience Applied: Protecting the Unborn, and Not Being Lovers of Pleasure

Every era and every culture has its sins, including America in the 21st century. Praise God that while there are still racial issues to resolve, the country is no longer plagued with the sin of slavery thanks to the pioneering work of many devout Christians in England and America and the sacrifices of many in the Civil War. Have you ever stopped and asked yourself what the predominant sins of America today are? Which of the country's actions most grieves the heart of God and how do you know what God cares about the most? Sin of any category puts a person in danger of hell without forgiveness through Jesus Christ, but not all sins are of equal severity. The following areas deeply trouble God in American culture today.

I. ABORTION

In the last 40 years, America has murdered over 50 million innocent unborn babies through the practice of abortion. It is a tragedy of extraordinary proportion, significantly dwarfing other evils in American or world history. By comparison, at the time of the Civil War, four million were in slavery— an awful tragedy—but as terrible as that was, still not as bad as 50 million murdered by their own mothers (and often with the approval and coercion of the fathers) before birth. In the Holocaust, Hitler murdered six million Jews and probably another six million Gypsies (Roma), Poles, and other Slavs for a total of 12 million dead. Stalin probably caused the death of more than 25 million in the Soviet Union, but these numbers pale in comparison to the number of killings by American mothers and fathers in the past 40 years.

What is your response to the prevalence of abortion in America (or your own country)? Do you consider it to be murder? Why or why not?

The following Psalm recounts how Israel failed to destroy the peoples in Canaan as God had commanded them and how the Israelites adopted the Canaanites' evil practices.

Read Psalm 106:34-42. Verses 37 and 38 demonstrate how the Israelites slaughtered their own children by offering them as sacrifices to false gods. What is God's response (vv. 39-42)?

Each year in America, one million women (and the men who help them) abort their babies. Is it fair to compare these abortions to the child sacrifices mentioned above? Do you think God's response is the same? Why or why not?

II. LOVERS OF PLEASURE

There's a difference between enjoying the pleasures that God offers in life and being *lovers* of pleasure. To enjoy pleasures in this life is a great gift from God and is nothing to be ashamed of. Holding back from enjoying everything in life is not one of the ways that we seek God and does not honor Him. However, to be a lover of pleasure means to put pleasure ahead of important responsibilities and tasks that the Lord has for us. For example, as a student, it is perfectly appropriate to enjoy yourself and have a good time if you are also studying hard. As a working professional, it is also good to enjoy pleasures if you are faithful to your work responsibilities. The Christian becomes a lover of pleasure when his pursuit of pleasure supplants important responsibilities and expectations the Lord has for him.

For example, if you do not take time to seek God through regular devotions as mentioned in a previous lesson, but have time for watching TV, playing video games, participating in sports, socializing with friends, or other activities, then innocent amusements have turned you into a lover of pleasure. The same can be said of the Christian church at large when we spend enormous amounts of time tending to our recreational pleasures and parties and relatively little to the societal sins that offend God and that will eventually bring His judgment.

Read 2 Timothy 3:1-5. Being a lover of pleasure (v.4) leads to what (v.5)?

Read 1 Timothy 5:5-7. What is true of the woman who lives for pleasure (or in some translations, is "self-indulgent")?

American culture has an unprecedented number of pleasures and distractions available, including watching TV, socializing with friends, playing board games, playing video games, watching sporting events on TV and in person, participating in athletics, gardening, surfing the internet, interacting on social media, attending movies, riding horses, hobbies of a million kinds, going out to eat, visiting a spa, playing musical instruments, attending concerts, attending the theatre, remodeling our homes, going on vacations, etc. These activities are not wrong in and of themselves, but if we neglect what God asks of us and yet have time for these pleasures, then we have become lovers of pleasure.

It's jarring to consider, but don't let the startling nature of the truth keep you from reforming your lifestyle. God has provided pleasures for us to enjoy, but they absolutely cannot take the place of our responsibilities to God and other people. If you have "no time" to pray and read the Scriptures, yet find time during your day for the above activities, repent of your attitude and ask for prayers from others to help you be a man or woman who seeks after God wholeheartedly.

Repentance and Obedience Applied: Affirming Sexual Integrity and Marriage, and Avoiding Greed to Practice Generosity

The following areas are identified because the Bible reveals they are important to God, and because they are areas where American culture has deviated from the Biblical norm.

I. SEXUAL INTEGRITY AND MARRIAGE

It is a sad commentary that often non-Christian religions (e.g., Islam) cherish God's teachings on sexual integrity and marriage more than many Christians in America. The social costs of America's choices have been nothing less than devastating for children growing up with divorced parents, not to mention all the diseases that are spread. The Witherspoon Institute in Princeton, New Jersey has produced various scholarly documents on sexual integrity and marriage.

For more information, see <http://www.socialcostsofpornography.org> and http://www.winst.org/family_marriage_and_democracy/WI_Marriage.pdf.

Read Genesis 2:24. Sexual union belongs between one man and one woman in marriage. This has been God's design for humanity from the beginning.

Read Matthew 19:4-6. To what does Jesus Christ appeal to substantiate His statement that man and woman are to persevere together in marriage?

How do Jesus' words influence your own ideas about marriage?

II. GREED AND GENEROSITY

America is the richest country in the history of the world, but many Christians and non-Christians alike have become greedy materialists. The average American household gives away approximately 3% of its income each year. The good news is that Christians are slightly more generous than their secular peers, giving away about 30% more; however, this level of giving is still far below the 10% tithe which is the floor for giving, not the ceiling for Christians.

Unfortunately, we allow ourselves to be outwitted by the devil. Christians who make modest incomes of say, \$20,000 a year resist tithing \$2,000 because they feel they make so little and would have so little left. Christians who make larger incomes—for example, \$500,000 per year—resist tithing \$50,000 a year, because it's just so much money, it doesn't seem fair.

Read Matthew 23:23. The Pharisees were hypocrites because they were so fastidious about making sure they gave away at least 10% that they even gave 10% of the increase of their garden herbs, yet they neglected weightier matters like justice, mercy and faithfulness. What did Jesus tell them about the tithe?

Read 1 Timothy 6:17-19. America qualifies as a rich country, so this passage applies to Americans. What are the rich commanded to do?

America needs to repent of the shedding of innocent blood, being lovers of pleasure, a lack of sexual integrity, and greed. These are among America's most egregious sins although there are others.

When Ezra discovered that the Israelites were starting to intermarry with foreign women (a forbidden practice at the time), he wept, threw himself to the ground, tore hair out of his beard, tore his robe, fasted and prayed fervently (Ezra chapters 9 and 10). He was a godly man who knew what grieved the heart of God. Do the previously mentioned sins of America inspire you to seek God as he did? Why or why not?

Long-term obedience and faithfulness to God increases your standing with Him, which means your prayers to Him are more powerful. God receives every Christian's prayers and they all have an impact on Him, but not all in the same way and to the same extent. You may simply be aware of this spiritual reality intuitively. For example, if you have a significant prayer need, who are you more inclined to ask to pray for you, someone who is very mediocre in their faithfulness to God, or someone who is known to be consistently godly and devoted to the Lord?

The longer and more consistently you walk in faithfulness to God, the more powerful your prayers and the more you have sway with God. For example, God was so angry with the Israelites for creating the golden calf that he planned to wipe them out, but because of Moses' prayers, God relented.

Read James 5:16-18. The prayers of whom are powerful and effective?

Elijah was a godly man with tremendous power in his prayers. He lived a righteous life before God, and James promises similar power in prayer to all who live as he did.

Are there any hindrances to your long-term, consistent obedience? If so, what might they be?

LESSON FIVE

Seeking God Lifestyle, Principles 6-7

“Oh, magnify the LORD with me, and let us exalt his name together” Psalm 34:3

This final lesson will bring the seven principles to an end. On the fifth day you will have the opportunity to make a commitment to adopt a Seeking God Lifestyle. Prayerfully consider what God would have you to do at this point and what kind of life you want to lead as a modern day follower of Jesus.

LESSON FIVE, DAY ONE

Principle 6: Perseverance

The sixth principle embodying what it means to seek God diligently is perseverance. You cannot seek God wholeheartedly for only a few weeks and think that much will change in your life and environment, but, if you persevere in seeking God for a year or more you can be sure to see many of the changes described in this Bible Course manual. Seeking God is to be pursued as a lifestyle, and not merely episodically. God intends for every Christian to seek Him diligently day after day for their whole lives. A characteristic of the godly is that they seek Him in all seasons of their lives, year after year, knowing in faith that their persevering diligence will be rewarded.

Seeking God with regular and persevering diligence is difficult, and not just because it is always hard to persevere in something worthwhile, but because of a theological heresy that has infected parts of the American church. Michael McClymond, an authority on American church revival history and author of *Encyclopedia of Religious Revivals in America*, has stated that if there is an American heresy, it is the Word-Faith heresy.²¹ Because Americans believe that everything can and should happen immediately, whether

21. Conversation with the author, March 2008.

it be online banking at 2am, 24-hour eating establishments, or same-day shipping from Amazon.com, we have illegitimately imported American values of immediacy and convenience into Christian theology. American Christians have not acquired the view that we can have everything in the spiritual realm immediately from the Bible, but from American culture. We may use Biblical terms such as “faith”, but the endeavor of seeking God and acquiring His power and presence in our lives is not an easy or immediate one, as the Scriptures make plain.

Read Hosea 10:12. The prophet urges his hearers and readers to seek the LORD until when?

Read Luke 11:1-13. Notice the persevering nature of prayer, how you must ask, seek, and knock. If you persevere, what will the Lord give you (v.13)?

Can you name causes for which you have wearied yourself? Have you wearied yourself athletically, academically or otherwise? Name some of the challenges in your life which required that you weary yourself to accomplish something:

Was your effort worth it?

How have you wearied yourself in seeking God?

If you do not weary yourself in seeking God the way you may have wearied yourself to achieve academically, athletically, socially, or in the workplace, what do you expect the consequences to be in terms of God’s power and presence in your life?

How does a person weary himself in seeking after God?

A person exercising 20 minutes a day with a modest amount of effort should not be surprised that he or she is not at his athletic peak. Likewise, a student studying only 30 minutes a day should not be surprised if he or she doesn’t reach his academic potential. What do you think are the implications of this dynamic for your spiritual life?

Why do you think that Christians fail to put effort into seeking God as outlined in the Scriptures, but then wonder why they have little victory over sin, little courage to evangelize, confusion in determining God’s will, and little understanding of God’s purposes for them?

Principle 7: Gathering *with* Others and Gathering *of* Others

The following passage from the 1853 autobiography of Rev. James Finley recounts his salvation at the Cane Ridge revival. In the late summer of 1801 a crowd estimated at 10,000 to 25,000 gathered for a week to pray, hear the word preached, repent, worship, and seek God. The Holy Spirit fell powerfully, and many historians mark this event as the beginning of the Second Great Awakening, a period of 30 or 40 years of mass conversions and spiritual renewal across the United States.²²

In the month of August, 1801, I learned there was to be a great meeting at Cane Ridge, in my father's old congregation. Feeling a great desire to see the wonderful things which had come to my ears, and having been solicited by some of my old schoolmates to go over into Kentucky for the purpose of revisiting the scenes of my boyhood, I resolved to go. Obtaining company, I started from my woody retreat in Highland county. Having reached the neighborhood of the meeting, we stopped and put up for the night. The family, who seemed to be posted in regard to all the movements of the meeting, cheerfully answered all our inquiries, and gave us all the information we desired; The next morning we started for the meeting. On the way I said to my companions, "Now, if I fall it must be by physical power and not by singing and praying;" and as I prided myself upon my manhood and courage, I had no fear of being overcome by any nervous excitability, or being frightened into religion. We arrived upon the ground, and here a scene presented itself to my mind not only novel and unaccountable, but awful beyond description. A vast crowd, supposed by some to have amounted to twenty-five thousand, was collected together. The noise was like the roar of Niagara. The vast sea of human beings seemed to be agitated as if by a storm. I counted seven ministers, all preaching at one time, some on stumps, others in wagons, and one—the Rev. William Burke, now of Cincinnati—was standing on a tree which had, in falling, lodged against another. Some of the people were singing, others praying, some crying for mercy in the most piteous accents, while others were shouting most vociferously. While witnessing these scenes, a peculiarly strange sensation, such as I had never felt before, came over me. My heart beat tumultuously, my knees trembled, my lip quivered, and I felt as though I must fall to the ground. A strange supernatural power seemed to pervade the entire mass

22. "A Testimony from the Cane Ridge Revival, 1801" accessed December 28, 2010, http://www.sermonindex.net/modules/newbb/viewtopic.php?topic_id=30740&forum=40&3.

of mind there collected. I became so weak and powerless that I found it necessary to sit down. Soon after I left and went into the woods and there I strove to rally and man up my courage. I tried to philosophize in regard to these wonderful exhibitions, resolving them into mere sympathetic excitement—a kind of religious enthusiasm, inspired by songs and eloquent harangues. My pride was wounded, for I had supposed that my mental and physical strength and vigor could most successfully resist these influences. After some time I returned to the scene of excitement the waves of which, if possible, had risen still higher. The same awfulness of feeling came over me. I stepped up on to a log, where I could have a better view of the surging sea of humanity. The scene that then presented itself to my mind was indescribable. At one time I saw at least five hundred swept down in a moment, as if a battery of a thousand guns had been opened upon them, and then immediately followed shrieks and shouts that rent the very heavens. My hair rose up on my head, my whole frame trembled, the blood ran cold in my veins, and I fled for the woods a second time, and wished I had stayed at home. While I remained here my feelings became intense and insupportable. A sense of suffocation and blindness seemed to come over me, and I thought I was going to die. There being a tavern about half mile off, I concluded to go and get some brandy, and see if it would not strengthen my nerves. When I arrived there I was disgusted with the sight that met my eyes. Here I saw about one hundred men engaged in drunken revelry, playing cards, trading horses, quarreling, and fighting. After some time I got to the bar, and took a dram and left, feeling that I was as near hell as I wished to be, either in this or the world to come. The brandy had no effect in allaying my feelings, but, if anything, made me worse. Night at length came on, and I was afraid to see any of my companions. I cautiously avoided them, fearing lest they should discover something the matter with me. In this state I wandered about from place to place, in and around the encampment. At times it seemed as if all the sins I had ever committed in my life were vividly brought up in array before my terrified imagination, and under their awful pressure I felt that I must die if I did not get relief. Then it was that I saw clearly through the thin veil of Universalism, and this refuge of lies was swept away by the Spirit of God. Then fell the scales from my sin-blinded eyes, and I realized, in all its force and power, the awful truth, that if I died in my sins I was a lost man forever. Oh how I dreaded the death of the soul; for

“There is a death whose pang
Outlasts the fleeting breath:
Oh what eternal horrors hang
Around the second death”

Notwithstanding all this, my heart was so proud and hard that I would not have fallen to the ground for the whole state of Kentucky. I felt that such an event would have been an everlasting disgrace, and put a final quietus on my boasted manhood and courage. At night I went to a barn in the neighborhood, and creeping under the hay, spent a most dismal night. I resolved, in the morning, to start for home, for I felt that I was a ruined man. Finding one of the friends who came over with me, I said, “Captain, let us be off; I will stay no longer.” He assented, and getting our horses we started for home. We said but little on the way, though many a deep, long-drawn sigh told the emotions of my heart. When we arrived at the Blue Lick Knobs, I broke the silence which reigned

mutually between us. Like long-pent-up waters, seeking for an avenue in the rock, the fountains of my soul were broken up, and I exclaimed, "Captain, if you and I don't stop our wickedness the devil will get us both." Then came from my streaming eyes the bitter tears, and I could scarcely refrain from screaming aloud. This startled and alarmed my companion, and he commenced weeping too. Night approaching, we put up near May-slick, the whole of which was spent by me in weeping and promising God, if he would spare me till morning I would pray and try to mend my life and abandon my wicked courses. As soon as day broke I went to the woods to pray, and no sooner had my knees touched the ground than I cried aloud for mercy and salvation, and fell prostrate. My cries wore so loud that they attracted the attention of the neighbors, many of whom gathered around me. Among the number was a German from Switzerland, who had experienced religion. He, understanding fully my condition, had me carried to his house and laid on a bed. The old Dutch saint directed me to look right away to the Savior. He then kneeled at the bedside and prayed for my salvation most fervently, in Dutch and broken English. He then rose and sung in the same manner, and continued singing and praying alternately till nine o'clock, when suddenly my load was gone, my guilt removed, and presently the direct witness from heaven shone full upon my soul. Then there flowed such copious streams of love into the hitherto waste and desolate places in my soul, that I thought I should die with excess of joy. I cried, I laughed, I shouted, and so strangely did I appear to all but my Dutch brother, that they thought me deranged.

The foregoing story illustrates the power of the seventh principle of seeking after God: that of gathering together with other Christians for extended periods of worship, Bible teaching, prayer and repentance. The seventh principle has two parts, the first of which is the importance of gathering *with* others for regular short times of encouragement and devotion as well as gathering for longer periods twice each year. The second part, described on Day 4, is the importance of gathering *of* others.

GATHERING WITH OTHERS

Throughout the Week

Tremendous encouragement and zeal for God results from gathering with others in community to seek God in prayer and Scripture reading. As noted in a previous lesson, the Biblical pattern and historical pattern of the church in the first century was to pray and read the Bible two or three set times per day, which translates into 14 to 21 sessions per week. The modern American Christian usually gathers only one or two times per week (if at all) with others: usually church on Sunday morning and perhaps a Bible study in the evening one day per week. For the vast majority of the rest of the set times, the American Christian believes he will need spend time with God alone, which is difficult to do. There are some who do this easily, just as there are some athletes who train easily on their own, but the majority of athletes and the majority of Christians do well if a large number of the 14-21 sessions per week are with others in community. You will find this very encouraging and strengthening. Some people have daily set devotional patterns with their spouses, but as a student it is unlikely you are married, so you need to find other ways to gather with Christians. Some gather with friends at night or in the morning to pray in person or by phone.

Two Week-long Conferences per Year

American Christians are often shocked to learn that the Biblical pattern for seeking God entails two or

three set times of Bible reading and prayer per day, and equally shocking is the realization of the Biblical pattern of two week-long conferences per year.

In high school and college, students often participate in week-long (or longer) Christian camps, retreats, conferences and mission trips, which enormously encourage them in their love for God. Sadly, some Christians then begin to believe that they need to graduate from such experiences and that they don't need those extended times of devotion to God anymore. They describe them as "mountaintop" experiences, and they reason wrongly that now they have matured and no longer need multi-day conferences to be strong in Christ.

Christians are designed to need these extended times every year of their lives if they are to remain devout for Christ. Often, Christians in their 30's, 40's or older will notice a spiritual coldness in their lives, and will not know that it probably results from the fact that they no longer take extended times to get strengthened in Christ. They attribute their youthful devotion to Christ as something that was characteristic of their younger age, when in fact it was due in large measure to their participation in extended Christian conferences or retreats.

This was not always the case in American culture. America has a strong legacy of what some historians call the camp meeting movement. In her book *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States*, published by Oxford University Press, Cindy Aron points out that much of the current impetus for vacationing in American culture derives from the practice of Christians drawing away from regular work for a week at a time to worship God and hear Christian preaching at camp meetings.²³ Except for the very wealthy elites who took vacations for health or leisure reasons, camp meetings served as vacations for Americans. Hundreds, and sometimes thousands, would gather together in a valley and pitch their tents for a week to hear Christian teaching, worship, and draw close to God.

These gatherings had a powerful impact on spiritual life in America. As a matter of fact, historians trace the beginning of the Second Great Awakening to a camp meeting in Cane Ridge, Kentucky in 1801. (Rev. James Finley's personal conversion account of that meeting is told on Day 2 of this lesson.)

Tragically, in the last hundred years or more of American history, even Christians have secularized vacation. Vacation is experienced as a time away from work, responsibilities, and even pursuit of God. Christians often spend even less time seeking God in worship, prayer, and Bible teaching during vacation than during the rest of the year. People see rest as a time to escape from the presence of God, when in truth, God Himself *is our rest*. If you have ever experienced a week-long conference of good Biblical teaching, worship, prayer, and repentance then you know this first-hand. There is nothing more energizing, restful, and strengthening than being in the Lord's presence. You return to regular life far more rested and energized than if you simply read a book on the beach for a week, or even if you participate in some of your favorite sports or travel adventures.

Arguably, God intends for you to experience Him this closely and powerfully twice a year, for all the years of your life.

23. Cindy S. Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 30-32.

Principle 7: Gathering *with* Others and Gathering *of* Others (cont'd)

Christian Conferences

The Scriptures set a pattern for multi-day experiences of seeking God through worship, confession of sin, prayer, and public reading of the Scriptures.

God required the ancient Israelites to spend a week twice each year to re-consecrate their lives to Him during the Feast of Unleavened Bread in the spring and the Feast of Tabernacles (or Feast of Booths) in the fall. The third major feast, the Feast of Weeks, was only one day long and held in the late spring of each year.

The day of Passover preceded the week-long Feast of Unleavened Bread, both of which commemorated the Lord's deliverance of Israel from Egypt. It takes time for leaven to work through dough for it to rise, so the Israelites were to eat unleavened bread during this feast to remember the haste in which the Israelites packed up and left Egypt (Exodus 13:3-10; Leviticus 23:4-8; Numbers 28:16-25; Deuteronomy 16:1-8).

In the fall of each year during the Feast of Tabernacles the Israelites lived in tents (also called tabernacles or booths) for a week to commemorate the 40 years of living in tents in the desert before being allowed to enter the promised land (Leviticus 23:33-43; Numbers 29:12-40; Deuteronomy 16:13-15).

God established these commandments for Israel in approximately 1250 B.C., but were only sporadically observed throughout history. When the Israelites kept the Feasts, the spiritual impact was nothing less than spectacular. To get a sense of the spiritual impact of keeping the Feasts, read the following accounts:

Passover and Feast of Unleavened Bread

In approximately 715 B.C., King Hezekiah of Judah realized the need to keep the Passover and sent couriers all over Judah and Israel to call people to Jerusalem to come and keep the Feast. Many scoffed at the idea, but others responded positively and came to Jerusalem for the designated week-long Feast. 2 Chronicles 30:1-27 records these events and v. 19 demonstrates that participating in the feast is part of what it means to seek God.

Read 2 Chronicles 30:1-27. What were some of the events that characterized the week?

Read 2 Chronicles 31:1. What actions reflecting their newfound zeal for God did the participants take once the two weeks were over (the people enjoyed the first week so much that they extended it to two)?

Feast of Tabernacles

In 425 B.C., a group of godly Israelites realized that they had been remiss in keeping the Feasts, so they organized a week-long celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles.

Read Nehemiah 8:13-18. What activities characterized the feast?

What week-long or longer Christian conferences have you attended in the past and what was the spiritual effect on you personally?

Those valuing athletics regularly invest extended time each year to develop their athletic abilities by going on tour, or going to a summer athletic camp. Similarly, those valuing education invest extended time each year: nine months a year for college students, and one-week or two-week seminars for working professionals. If you desire to be a man or woman who seeks God, it is imperative that you discipline yourself and set your schedule so that you have extended times to seek God each year. What week-long Christian conferences do you plan to attend in the next 12 months (if week-long conferences are not available, consider weekend Christian conferences as the next best alternative)?

A week-long Christian conference will do wonders for your faith, and spending six weeks in the summer on a missions trip will do even more. Many have characterized a summer missions trip experience as one of the defining experiences in their lives.

GATHERING OF OTHERS

When a person is zealous for God, it is only natural that he would eagerly encourage others to seek hard after God as well. Calling others to seek God is part and parcel of seeking after God yourself. This includes calling non-Christians to become Christians and calling on Christians to be fully devoted to God, seeking Him diligently.

Jonathan Edwards, graduate of Yale College and president of Princeton University, described the following passage as the most descriptive of revival in the Bible. Given his status as probably the most respected voice on revival in church history, his claim is worth considering.

Read Zechariah 8:20-23. In verse 21, what are the actions of those seeking after God?

What results are recorded in verses 22 and 23?

Is your fervor for God so strong that you are imploring, encouraging, and pleading others to join you in seeking the Lord (encouraging non-Christians to come to faith, and Christians to seek God wholeheartedly)?

By this point in this study, you should know very well how to increase your own fervor: by following the seven principles described in this study.

Principle 7: Gathering *with* Others and Gathering *of* Others (cont'd)

Many good reasons to seek God wholeheartedly have been covered, including the extraordinary personal and societal benefits that come to those who seek Him. There are many legitimate and godly reasons to seek God with your whole heart. However, more importantly, you should seek God simply because He is God, and you should seek Him because of the extraordinary love He has shown to you.

HE IS GOD

The eternal and divine nature of God compels us to draw close to Him and be aligned with Him.

Read Isaiah 44:6-8. How does God's eternal uniqueness inspire you to seek Him?

Even in God's very presence, heavenly beings and passed-on Christians seek to worship God. **Read Revelation chapters 4 and 5.** What inspires these individuals to pursue God even though He is present with them? How does that motivate you to draw close to God, whether He feels near or far?

HIS LOVE FOR YOU

Countless novels, poems and screenplays have been written about true, deep, and enduring love between a man and woman, because few themes capture our hearts like that of everlasting, unyielding, and tender love. We all long to be loved that way and in our better moments desire to provide that sort of love to others.

Yet, you have never been loved by another person nor will you ever be loved to the same degree as you are loved by the God who has given His life for you through the death of His Son, Jesus Christ. His love for you is truly everlasting and in many ways even beyond your comprehension.

If you fully understood how much He loves you, it would radically and irrevocably change your life. The intensity and constancy of His love is truly remarkable, even though it is often obscured by pain, suffering, and deception. It may be the case that you have no idea that God is for you, loves you, and wants to personally relate with you, but that is the amazing truth.

In the Bible, God repeatedly declares His love for you: “The LORD your God loves you” (Deuteronomy 23:5); “I have loved you with an everlasting love” (Jeremiah 31:3); “I have loved you, says the LORD” (Malachi 1:2). He declares His love often, and this love is recognized by the hearers. For example, Moses said, “Surely it is you who love the people” (Deuteronomy 33:3). Even more importantly, his love is demonstrated in personal, compassionate ways, such as when He noticed that Leah, wife of Jacob, was not loved by her husband, so God gave her sons to comfort her to gain her husband’s love (Genesis 29:31-35). Another example is when a prophet performed a miracle, making an axe head float in the river so that it could be found, because a man had borrowed it and worried about how he could repay it if he lost it (2 Kings 6:1-6). Yet another example is when Jesus raised a dead son back to life because his mother was a widow and had no one else to care for her. The excited onlookers exclaimed, “God has come to help his people!” (Luke 7:11-17).

God has performed wonderful acts of love in history, and is just as real today in the 21st century, showing His love often. God created you and gives you joy, food, shelter, comfort; He has always been there with you and has a destiny and plan for you. All the small miracles in your life are demonstrations of God’s love towards you. It’s so important that you comprehend God’s love for you that the apostle Paul prayed and wrote one of the earliest Christian prayers to that end: “And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God” (Ephesians 3:17-19).

God’s ultimate act of love, perhaps after His creation of you, is the sacrifice of His Son for you.

Read 1 John 4:10. Can you conceive of any person loving another the way God has loved you? How much does God’s love for you motivate you to seek after Him?

Mediate on Psalm 18:1-2; 34:1-5; 103:1-5. How do these psalms speak to you about seeking the Lord because of His love for you?

Conclusion and Commitment to a Seeking God Lifestyle

This lesson marks the conclusion of the Seeking God Lifestyle Bible Course. You have probably found the content to be challenging whether you have been a Christian a long time or are just coming into the faith. Because the bar for the Christian life has been relatively low in America for so long, we recoil when we encounter the true Biblical standard, but as we seek God wholeheartedly, we can expect extraordinary fillings of the Holy Spirit.

By comparison, Christian communities in other parts of the world including China, Korea, the Fiji Islands, Ethiopia and Uganda are accustomed to seeking God with the diligence described in the Scriptures. By way of review, the Christian seeks God through the following means by faith:

- 1. Humbling oneself, taking advantage of the help that fasting provides.** Christians can fast regularly (first-century Christians fasted twice a week), and for longer periods of time for special occasions (examples in the Bible include three days, ten days, 40 days, 70 days, and 120 days).
- 2. Praying fervently and frequently.** Christians can mark out two or three set times per day for devotions, either alone or with others. This is in addition to saying quick prayers throughout the day or before meals. In many cultures Christians initiate 24-hour prayer efforts for months and years and even regular all-night prayer meetings.
- 3. Taking in the Scriptures.** Christian can engage the Bible during morning and evening devotions through reading, memorizing, meditating, hearing, studying, and listening to good sermons.
- 4. Repenting of sins personally and corporately.** Christ must be Lord of everything in your life including your sex life, social life, recreational life (it can't be so large that it crowds out your prayer and Bible reading), and financial life.
- 5. Obeying God day by day, moment by moment.** Living a consistent righteous life over time pleases God and draws His presence.
- 6. Persevering in seeking after God day after day, month after month.** There's no way you can seek God wholeheartedly for a whole year and not see significant changes, but seeking God is not something to be pursued just for a year, but as a way of life for the rest of your life.

7. Gathering with others and gathering of others. For your daily devotionals, join with other Christians as much as you can. Of the 14-21 times per week, try to join with others for many of those sessions. Additionally, set aside time for two week-long (or weekend if that's all you can manage) Christian conferences per year so that you stay strong in your devotion to Christ. Lastly, encourage and plead with others to join you in seeking the Lord.

Does a Christian need to participate in all the activities mentioned in the seven principles? That depends on your perspective in two ways:

- The first is by answering the question of whether you must obey Jesus Christ and love Him wholeheartedly just because you have pledged to do so. Every person who repents of his sins and puts his faith in Jesus Christ has pledged to love Him first and foremost, and to loyally follow Him regardless of the sacrifice. Are you a person who believes you need to follow through on your commitment to Christ? If a coach asked you to only join a team if you would commit to being fully involved for the whole season, do you believe you should follow through on that commitment? What if the Savior of the world, the King of Kings, has asked you to follow Him wholeheartedly? You have pledged to give Him your whole life. Do you mean it?
- A second way of considering whether you need to seek God wholeheartedly is by asking yourself if you are prepared for the consequences, good and bad, of your decision. Following Him wholeheartedly guarantees that you will fulfill the destiny He has for you, that you will have His presence and power on your life, and that you will receive many rewards in the next life, even if there is hardship in this one. By not following Him wholeheartedly, you can expect a harder time having victory over sin, not nearly as much revelation from Him, not as much power to witness, and not as much responsiveness on His part to your prayers. You can expect little in ways of rewards in the next life, and it is also possible that you will experience a moderate to severe amount of judgment in this life. Does an athlete “have” to workout? Well, if he wants to succeed he does, but one who is training for a marathon is not forced by any authority to train before the day of the race, and should not be surprised if he or she cannot finish the race, or does not get a very good time, or gets injured in the process if he fails to adequately prepare.

Each of these principles is a door, an opportunity to draw near to God that He may draw nearer to you. If you desire to seek God wholeheartedly, then take the pledge on the following page.

Seeking God Lifestyle Pledge:

— 1 —

*I will seek to humble myself through regularly fasting at least a few days every month.
I will also fast for longer periods of time for special purposes every year.*

— 2 —

I will set aside 2 or 3 times per day to seek the Lord in prayer.

— 3 —

*During each of those times of seeking the Lord in prayer,
I will also devote time to reading the Bible.*

— 4 —

I will repent today of all sins and will confess my sins every day.

— 5 —

To the best of my ability, I will lead an obedient and holy life before the Lord.

— 6 —

I will persevere in my devotion to Christ.

— 7 —

*I will prioritize my calendar so that I attend two week-long Christian conferences
per year (and if not possible, then perhaps weekend conferences), and I will
continually urge others to seek the Lord with me.*

Remember, in Christ, we have total freedom *from* the curse of the law. He has purchased our freedom *to* pursue our matchless God. What a gift purchased by our Savior! Galatians 2:19 says, “For through the law I died to the law, so that I might live to God.” Be careful on your journey not to pursue the list of principles for their own sake, but to pure-heartedly pursue God through them. May the Lord bless you as you seek Him with your whole heart! You will experience His presence through fillings of the Holy Spirit like never before.

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Please visit Christian Union’s **DayandNight.org** website to find more devotional resources plus information on opportunities to take part in nation-wide prayer and fasting initiatives.

APPENDIX I

Help Transform America

If you have enjoyed this Bible course, it might encourage you to know that it—and numerous other in-depth Bible courses like it (most often on entire books of the Bible)—have been developed by Christian Union as part of its ministry to students at some of America’s most influential and secular universities. These schools include Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Dartmouth, Harvard, Harvard Law, Penn, Princeton, Stanford, and Yale—schools that have historically produced a disproportionately high percentage of America’s leaders.

God has been at work in students’ lives, and many have come to faith and grown in their relationship with the Lord as the result of this work. At several of these schools, in various seasons, Christian Union’s ministry has been the largest student organization of any kind on campus. The ministry’s work has now extended beyond university settings to New York City and the nation, strengthening Christians in every sector of society.

The development of these studies, and the salaries of the Christian Union ministry faculty who teach them (and who also mentor and disciple these students and adults) are funded by gifts of all sizes from generous ministry partners who want to see America and the world reached for Christ.

If our nation’s leaders can be reached today, they will bear great fruit and bring God great glory in the future. CU’s mission and prayer is that the ministry’s work will lead to revival and reformation in America and beyond.

Please prayerfully consider partnering with Christian Union today, to help extend its ability to reach present and future leaders for Christ.

Go to **ChristianUnion.org/cp** to learn more, or to become a partner today.

APPENDIX II

Praying Around the Clock

From the earliest of times, Christians prayed at multiple set times per day. It was common practice for Christians in the first century to pray two or three set times per day. By the end of the second century, most Christians prayed five or more set times per day. Through the years, there were various movements to pray at more set times and even on a continuous basis. Perhaps the most famous group of Christians to pray around the clock for an on-going period is the Moravians, located in what is now Germany. They experienced a profound filling of the Spirit at one of their meetings (some call this the Moravian Pentecost), and resolved to pray around the clock to the glory and praise of God. They divided the day into one-hour segments and 24 men and 24 women took shifts every other day to offer continuous prayer to God. This prayer initiative began in 1727 and remarkably lasted over 100 years. They had a theme verse that inspired their work from Isaiah 66:6, 7: “I have posted watchmen on your walls, O Jerusalem; they will never be silent day or night. You who call on the LORD, give yourselves no rest, and give him no rest till he establishes Jerusalem and makes her the praise of the earth.” Another verse that inspired and informed their work was Leviticus 6:13, which says, “The fire must be kept burning on the altar continuously; it must not go out.” It refers to the fire on the altar, which was to be kept burning for the two daily burnt offerings as well as other sacrifices.

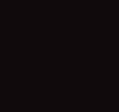
The Moravians called their effort “The Lord’s Watch.” The fruit of this devotion to God was extraordinary as the small group of Protestant Christians sent out more missionaries in the next 20 years than all of Protestantism had in the previous 200 years. Their spirituality had an enormous impact on John Wesley, founder of the Methodist Church, and George Fox, founder of the Society of Friends (the Quakers). Their efforts have inspired others through the years, including Pastor David Yonggi Cho, pastor of the largest church in the world in Seoul, Korea. The church he founded has over 1,000,000 members and he attributes the extraordinary growth to prayer. In the 1970’s he set up what he calls a “prayer mountain” where he and his congregation go to pray at any time day or night around the clock. At any given time, day or night, there are between 2,000 and 3,000 men and women praying fervently. This has been happening continually since “prayer mountain” was founded in 1973. This is not the only church in Korea to practice this sort of continuous praying. Many churches have their own “prayer mountains.”

In the late 1990’s, students at Princeton University were inspired by the Moravians to pray around the clock and one spring prayed for 40 days continuously during Lent. A student moved out of her single room and into a room with a friend so that students could pray around the clock. The next year, the students prayed continuously for the entire spring using the campus center as the location since it was open 24 hours a day at the time. The impact for Christ during these years was extraordinary, culminating

in a few student gatherings on Cannon Green (a central meeting place on campus) with over 10% of the student body present, worshipping the Lord.

The Moravian example also inspired what is known as the International House of Prayer (IHOP), which began a continuous prayer effort in 1999 in Kansas City. They produce a live video feed of their continuous prayer and praise initiative, which can be seen online.

In the United States, there are just a few university campuses where continuous prayer is practiced. These are large state schools in the South with literally thousands of Christians on campus, but even so, prayer is typically suspended during Christmas break, spring break and summer break. The launch and on-going maintenance of a continuous prayer initiative at an influential, secular university would be truly extraordinary, bringing radical spiritual change and inspiration to the nation.



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