



AFTER

I BELIEVE

**PARTICIPANT
WORKBOOK**

WEEK 1

In every person's life, they are faced with a decision of belief:

- To believe that Jesus was who He said He was: God Himself in human form
- To believe that Jesus did what no one else but He could do: pay the penalty of our sins and offer us forgiveness
- To believe that God truly is in control and that we should submit our lives to Him

This is a class for those who have made the decision to say "I believe" - to explore what comes next...

Group Introductions/Discussion

1. Share your name and how you spend the majority of your days.
2. When did you say "I believe" to God? Was there a specific moment, or was it a gradual "I believe" over time?
3. What are you most interested in learning in this class?

YOUR NEW IDENTITY IN CHRIST

"Anyone who belongs to Christ has become a new person. The old life is gone; a new life has begun! And all of this is a gift from God, who brought us back to himself through Christ." **(2 Corinthians 5:17-18, NLT)**

After you said "I believe" to God, your identity changed. You are now a **CHILD** of God, called to *live as one*.

As God's son/daughter, you can approach Him as your *Abba* (Hebrew for "Daddy"), confident in His love for you.

God has also declared you to be a **SAINT**.

= "one who has been set apart" or made holy

You are no longer under the weight of sin; instead, you are covered by the sinlessness of Christ.

As a saint, your clear agenda is to become like **JESUS**.

God wants to help you *live* as the new person that you are.

THE DEADLY DECEPTION

Along your Christian journey, you'll encounter several roadblocks - myths of spiritual growth intended to keep you chained to your previous way of life.

They are rooted in the deadly deception that to achieve spirituality, you only need to **APPEAR** spiritual when it comes to spiritual things.

In other words, the focus is on going through the motions of religious rites, rituals, membership processes, religious services and ceremonies, etc.

This is also known as **LEGALISM**.

Akin to the deadly deception is the idea that expressing knowledge *about* God is more important than living out what you claim to believe.

The TRUTH: there is no such thing as a spiritual life. There's only life, and it's meant - all of it - to be lived spiritually. Believing in God is about giving your life over to what you say you believe.

OTHER MYTHS

MYTH #1: Spirituality happens **INSTANTLY** at the moment you enter into a relationship with God.

The thought: "Just add God and you get a spiritual life!"

The TRUTH: Entering into a relationship with God does nothing more than **BEGIN** the ongoing development of that relationship.

The Christian life is less like a sprint and more like a marathon as you learn to develop in intimacy and depth over time.

MYTH #2: Spirituality is simply a by-product of **TIME**.

The thought: Mere exposure to spiritual things makes you a Christian, so the longer you're exposed to them, the more spiritual you'll become.

The TRUTH: Exposure to spiritual things is not what makes you a Christian. It's your **INVESTMENT** into them that does.

MYTH #3: Spiritual growth is attained through **EFFORT**.

The thought: One must simply *decide* to become spiritual, achieving it through willpower.

The TRUTH: You cannot *will* yourself to become like Jesus, but you can **TRAIN** to be like Him by studying Him and doing the things He did.

The key to the spiritual life is to order your life around those activities, disciplines and practices that were modeled by Christ in order to accomplish through training what you cannot do by trying.

MYTH #4: A personal relationship with God is synonymous with a **PRIVATE** relationship with God.

The thought: We don't need anyone else as we pursue God.

The TRUTH: Becoming a truly spiritual person is a **TEAM SPORT**.

The Christian life is one lived within the context of community.

MYTH #5: **TRANSFORMATION** is an achievement or something you attain once and forever.

The thought: The spiritual life is like a light switch. Once it's flipped on, it's on forever.

The TRUTH: Spiritual growth is a **PROCESS** of three steps forward, two steps back.

The state of your spirituality does not rest on how you feel, but on who you are - and who you are becoming.

Group Discussion

1. Which myth do you think you're most prone to believe?
2. Discuss the potential consequences of believing the deadly deception or any of the myths we discussed.

HOW TO BIBLE

The Bible is the training manual for the Christian life.

“All Scripture is breathed out of God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be equipped for every good work.” (2 Timothy 3:16-17, ESV)

TIP:

To further orient yourself in the Bible, head to page 51.

Get a **CONTEMPORARY** translation of the Bible.

Bible translations are constantly adapting as languages change. You need one that reflects how you think and speak every day.

A couple of recommended modern translations:

- New International Version (NIV)
- New Living Translation (NLT)

Start with **JESUS** in one of the four biographies of His life: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

The entire Bible points to Jesus, so it makes sense to begin your reading by learning more about Him.

When you read, tackle just a chapter or two at a time, and read with a normal eye toward discovery.

Start with basic questions like:

- *Who is speaking?*
- *Who was it written to?*
- *What are the main ideas?*
- *Where does this story take place?*
- *When was it written?*

Then, move on to more complex questions, such as:

- *What was the background of the writer?*
- *What was going on at that time in history?*
- *What seems to be the key section or verse in the passage?*

After asking and answering the basic observation questions, move on to interpreting what you've read.

Three Principles of Interpretation:

1. Always try to find the author's **INTENT**.

In other words, seek to discover what the text *originally* meant to its audience.

This can often require the use of additional resources, so check out page 53 for a few suggested resources to get you started.

2. Always try to interpret the verse in light of its **CONTEXT**.

It's intellectually dishonest to take verses out of their context. Try to find a more complete picture about a subject/person/command by reading more widely about what the Bible has to say about it.

3. Let **SCRIPTURE** interpret Scripture.

Let the rest of the Bible inform you about God's position on any given topic.

Your Bible Concordance (in the back of the Bible) can help you find passages that share common words.

After reading and interpreting the Bible, approach what you read with a heart for

REFLECTION.

The goal of reading the Bible isn't to merely accumulate information. It's to let its word penetrate our heart to such depths that we might be transformed by them.

HOW WE CAN GET IT WRONG

The truth is that the Bible is not as difficult to read or understand as is often claimed. Rather, it's more difficult to follow through on what it says because in so many ways we resist its leadership.

There are three main ways in which we can circumvent the Bible's teaching:

1. The "cosmic **EXCEPTION** clause"

This involves making oneself an exception to a clear command or prohibition.

Ex: "God commands me in the Bible to be generous, but my current circumstances allow me to bypass that command."

This approach places us above God, deeming our personal assessment of life above God's assessment.

"If someone claims, 'I know God,' but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth. But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love him. That is how we know we are living in him. Those who say they live in God should live their lives as Jesus did" (**1 John 2:4-6, NLT**)

2. The “**FOOD BAR** approach”

This involves choosing what we like from the Bible and ignoring what we don't.

Again, this approach puts you in charge and denigrates God to a space of convenience.

3. The **COMPROMISE** game

This involves watering down clear teachings of the Bible by denying that it actually says what it does indeed say.

TWO CHOICES

The Bible confronts our life at the deepest, most uncomfortable, most life-changing levels imaginable. And we either welcome the confrontation or fight it. We either let God's word transform us or we let it threaten us.

“For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Nothing in all creation is hidden from God. Everything is naked and exposed before his eyes, and he is the one to whom we are accountable.” (**Hebrews 4:12-13, NLT**)

When applying the Bible, you can choose one of two ways to respond:

1. With a surrendered heart
2. With a defensive, rebellious spirit

Only the first response will give you the life in Christ you long for.

Group Discussion

1. Describe your experience with the Bible up until today. Have you read it before? How have you approached it? Has it been frustrating or life-giving?
2. Of the various ways in which we can try to circumvent the application of God's teaching in our lives, which do you think you're most prone to? Are there particular areas in your life that are particularly difficult for you to surrender to God?
3. What do you think your next step will be as it relates to reading the Bible?



WEEK 1 HOMEWORK

The focus of your homework this week is becoming better acquainted with and more comfortable reading the Bible.

1. If you haven't already, read through the Bible orientation tips located on page 51.
2. Choose 1-2 chapters from any of the four biographical accounts of Jesus' life: Matthew, Mark, Luke or John. First, read through the content fully without worrying about what any of it means or what you should do with it. Then, read through the content a second time as an observer, filling in as much of the chart below as you can.

BIBLE PASSAGE(S): (<i>ex: Matthew 1-2</i>)	
WHO is this about?	
WHAT happens?	
WHERE does this take place?	
WHEN does this take place?	
WHY is this happening?	

3. Take note below of any questions you have from the text you read.



4. Now that you've had a chance to read and observe, take some time to reflect on what you read. Use the questions below to guide your reflection:

Based on what I just read...

- What does God want me to KNOW?

- Who does God want me to BE?

- What does God want me to DO?

WEEK 2

WEEK 1 RECAP

- When you entered into a relationship with God, you were given a new identity. You're now a son or daughter of God as well as a saint. God wants to help you become more like Jesus in light of your new identity.
- If we don't embrace our new identity, we're more prone to believing lies about the Christian life, namely that *appearing* spiritual is more important than actually *becoming* spiritual.
- Reading the Bible is the primary way we get to know God and learn about the life He desires for us. But unless we're willing to put into practice what God commands, we will not experience the life change He has in mind for us.

Group Discussion

1. If you haven't already, introduce yourself and share what you do for work and fun.
2. Share how the Bible reading process went for you. Was it easy? Difficult? Revelatory? Anti-climactic?
3. What was your biggest takeaway from the Bible passages you read?
4. If you have additional time, discuss elements from last week's lesson that stuck with you throughout the week.

TALKING TO GOD

The act of prayer is not unique to the Christian faith, but the person we pray **TO** is.

Christians pray to the God of the Bible, who is personal and wants to commune with us.

In the Bible, Jesus gave us an example of how we can talk to God and what kinds of things we might talk to Him about. It's often known as The Lord's Prayer.

"When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him! Pray like this:

'Our Father in heaven,
 may your name be kept holy.
May your Kingdom come soon.
May your will be done on earth,
 as it is in heaven.
Give us today the food we need,
and forgive us our sins,
 as we have forgiven those who sin against us.
And don't let us yield to temptation,
 but rescue us from the evil one.

If you forgive those who sin against you, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you refuse to forgive others, your Father will not forgive your sins." **(Matthew 6:7-15, NLT)**

Based on Jesus' model, we gain several insights into prayer:

1. When we talk to God in prayer, we should be **INTIMATE**.

The word we translate to "Father" is *Abba* in Hebrew and more accurately translates to "Dad" or even "Daddy".

God wants us to approach Him as our Dad, with disarming honesty, an absence of guilt, utter transparency, boundless affection, unquenchable curiosity, and absolute truth. In other words, with true intimacy.

2. When we pray, we're to be **EXPECTANT**.

We need to always remember that our prayers matter to God and that He is capable of responding to us in a supernatural, limitless way.

3. When we pray, we're to pray to God **REVERENTLY**.

We're to pray in such a way that God's "name be kept holy."

Our prayers should reflect a balance of intimacy and respect, similar to that found in a healthy parent-child relationship.

4. When we pray, we're to pray **SUBMITTED** to God.

God isn't a genie tasked with giving us everything we desire. Instead, prayer aligns our hearts with God's, inclining us to want what God desires.

"May your Kingdom come soon. May your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." (**Matthew 6:10, NLT**)

5. When we pray, we're to be **DEPENDENT** on God.

We should pray for "the food we need" (Matthew 6:11), acknowledging that it's not just food we're dependent on God for, but *everything*.

6. When we talk to God in prayer, we should be **HONEST** and **AUTHENTIC**.

"And forgive us our sins, as we have forgiven those who sin against us." (**Matthew 6:12, NLT**)

Being honest with God includes being honest about our sins in a specific way.

7. When we pray, we're to be **HUMBLE**.

"And don't let us yield to temptation, but rescue us from the evil one" (**Matthew 6:13, NLT**)

It's important to be realistic with God about our weaknesses and where and when we need help. Without God's help, we do not have the power to overcome all of the temptations that we encounter.

Group Discussion

1. Were you already familiar with the Lord's Prayer? Share about your experience with it.
2. How might we prepare our hearts before we pray so that we can make sure we're embracing some of the attitudes Jesus modeled in His prayer?
3. Of the attitudes we talked about, which comes easiest to you? Hardest?

GOD'S RESPONSE TO PRAYER

Prayer is not a one-sided conversation. When we pray, God responds, although not always in the way we anticipate.

Ways God might respond:

1. God can say "**YES**".

If our prayers agree with God's will for us and His timing, there's nothing He delights in more than giving us the desires of our heart.

2. God can say "**NO**".

God often responds this way when the request itself is inappropriate, not best for us or uninformed.

Ex: The Bible records an incident when two of Jesus' disciples (James and John) arrived at a town but were not welcomed. In response, they asked Jesus:

"Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" (**Luke 9:52-54, NIV**)

Jesus' response: "Of course not!" (**Luke 9:55, The Message**)

When we receive a "no" response to a well-intentioned prayer request, we must decide whether God is trustworthy amidst our lack of understanding.

Either God is good, or He is not. Either we can trust Him, or we can't. When God seems to say "no", you can believe He knows best, or He doesn't.

3. God can say "**SLOW**".

aka: "not yet", "not now" or "not as fast as you're hoping for"

God knows the perfect timing for our lives and always has more information than we do.

"For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways... As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." (**Isaiah 55:8-9, NIV**)

4. God can say "**GROW**".

Sometimes our prayers reflect that something is wrong in *our* lives (i.e. behaviors, attitudes or choices that have created barriers between us and God).

The Bible outlines several prayer “blockers”:

1. **UNCONFESSED** sin

“Your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear.” (**Isaiah 59:2, NIV**)

While God does not demand we be perfect, He does expect us to be honest and submissive. If we knowingly act in rebellion to His will, He will not be moved by our prayers.

2. **UNRESOLVED** relational conflict

Before we approach God in prayer, we must address any lack of love or forgiveness we have been harboring toward others.

3. **SELFISHNESS**

“When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.” (**James 4:3, NIV**)

Group Discussion

1. How consistent are you in thanking God when He responds “yes” to your prayers? Share with your group about a recent request God answered “yes” to in your life.
2. In hindsight, we can sometimes see why God might have answered “no” to a particular request we made and why that response was best. Can you think of an example like that in your own life to share with your group?
3. Do you find it easier to pray for yourself or to pray for others? Explain why.

SPENDING TIME WITH GOD

In order to prioritize reading the Bible and talking to God in prayer, we must carve out intentional time to spend with Him.

Jesus modeled for us the importance of spending time alone with God and what we might impact it might have on our lives.

1. Jesus became **REDIRECTED**.

Spending time alone with God gave Jesus clarity with regards to what He was to do and where He was to go.

2. Jesus became **REFUELED**.

Jesus lived an exhausting life, but after He reconnected with His Father, He was made ready for new tasks and new challenges, given the energy and power to continue with His mission.

3. Jesus became **RESOLVED**.

Time with His Father affirmed Jesus's commitment to the big picture of His priorities and His life purpose.

"This is why I have come." **(Mark 1:38, NIV)**

If you could put something into your daily routine that would redirect you in ways you need it, refuel you where you are running on empty, and give you the resolve you need to follow your life purpose, would that be worth scheduling?

When it comes to spending time with God, be sure to decide *when* and *where* is best. It should involve a time and location free from as many distractions as possible. Once you have determined when and where is best, **PLAN** time with Him, starting with just a few days a week.

Once you've found the best time and place to be alone with God, here are a few things your time with Him might involve:

1. **SILENCE** and **SOLITUDE**

In addition to choosing a time and place that's naturally free of external distractions, you also want to protect it from internal distractions (your phone, email alerts, etc.). The idea is to take a "timeout" from life so that you can focus all of your attention on God and what matters to Him.

2. Your time with God should have **CONTENT**, purpose and direction.

Specifically, your time should include:

- Reading the Bible
- Reflecting on the Bible
- Responding to the Bible

7 MINUTES WITH GOD

If you're new to spending time with God, start with just 7 minutes. It may not seem like much, but it can be incredibly meaningful and powerful.

Consider dividing it up like this:

30 seconds: Prepare your heart.

Remove distractions and turn your attention to God. Ask Him to open your heart and help you to be responsive to what He wants to teach you.

4 1/2 minutes: Read the Bible.

Don't worry about studying it; just read it devotionally. In other words, read it slowly and thoughtfully.

2 1/2 minutes: Pray.

You can use the Lord's Prayer as a model or the ACTS model if they're helpful.

The ACTS prayer model:

- A - Adoration (expressing your feelings for God)
- C - Confession (confessing your sins to God)
- T - Thanksgiving (thanking God for all He has done in your life)
- S - Supply (asking God for His help and for the provision of your needs and the needs of others)

Once you get comfortable spending 7 minutes a day with God a few days a week, let that time grow in both number and frequency.

WEEK 3

WEEKS 1 & 2 RECAP

- The new identity we're given when we put our trust in God comes with a new mission for life: to become more like Jesus. We learn to live out that mission by reading the Bible.
- God is personal, and because of Jesus' sacrifice we're able to talk to God in prayer. Jesus modeled for us in the Lord's Prayer how to talk to God and what to talk to Him about.
- Reading the Bible and talking to God should be incorporated into intentional time we carve out to spend alone with God each and every day.

Group Discussion

1. For homework, you were asked to choose either the Lord's Prayer or the ACTS acronym to guide a time of prayer. Talk with your groups about which model you chose and what your experience was like.
2. You were also asked to carve out some intentional time to spend with God this past week. Share with your group about what you did during that time and whether you felt like it had any significance for you.

COMMUNITY

The Christian journey is one you take alongside other Christians. In fact, Jesus established a new community of believers, the **CHURCH**.

"I will build my church" (**Matthew 16:18, NIV**)

The Church is unlike any other community.

“They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.” **(Acts 2:42-47, NIV)**

It was to be marked by several characteristics; namely, the ability to:

- Love and be loved
- Know and be known
- Serve and be served
- Celebrate and be celebrated

Most people find that when they explore the vision for church that Jesus and the Bible describe, it isn't church *itself* they are turned off to, but the way people have been *doing* church.

A lie that Christians can often believe when it comes to our spiritual life is that we can do it **ON OUR OWN**.

The TRUTH: We can't. You cannot develop yourself spiritually to the degree God intends apart from others.

To experience the type of community that Jesus came to establish, you must first **JOIN** one (i.e. membership).

“You are members of God’s very own family... and you belong in God’s household with every other Christian.” **(Ephesians 2:19, TLB)**

Joining a church helps you enter into community, but you still must seize the power of the relational life by developing strategic relationships.

Strategic spiritual relationships can bring a degree of healthy **CHALLENGE** to your life.

“As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.” (**Proverbs 27:17, NIV**)

They can also serve as sources of encouragement and **SUPPORT**.

Strategic spiritual relationships can also provide much needed **ACCOUNTABILITY**.

Charles Colson’s men’s group used to regularly ask each other these questions (as recorded in his book *The Body*):

1. Have you been with a woman anywhere this past week that might be seen as compromising?
2. Have any of your financial dealings lacked integrity?
3. Have you exposed yourself to any sexually explicit material?
4. Have you spent adequate time in Bible study and prayer?
5. Have you given priority time to your family?
6. Have you fulfilled the mandates of your calling?
7. Have you just lied to me?

Healthy accountability invites objective counsel and helpful challenge, not scrutiny or judgment.

To discover the potential for strategic spiritual relationships in your own life, begin with a relational **INVENTORY**.

Do you already have people like this in your life - who can move you toward Jesus, not away from him? People who can mentor you?

If you can identify this spiritual potential within already-existing relationships, then comes time to strategically **DEVELOP** those relationships.

If you do NOT have any relationships like this in your life, your next step is to get involved in some form of smaller group within the church (i.e. Bible study, support group, serving team, etc.)

Group Discussion

1. What has your experience (if any) been with church? Positive? Negative? Share with your group.
2. Do you have any relationships in your life that resemble the strategic spiritual relationships we just discussed? If so, who are they? If not, what might your next step be?

WORSHIP

The word "worship" comes from an Anglo-Saxon word that literally meant "worth-ship." In other words, it is about giving worth or honor to someone/something.

Worship is the heart of the spiritual life.

Worship helps us to **ORDER** our lives around God.

Worship helps us to encounter and **EXPERIENCE** God.

Worship helps us **RESPOND** to God.

Worship helps you articulate your feelings to God as you seek to deepen your relationship with Him.

“I will praise you with music, telling of your faithfulness to all your promises.... I will... sing your praises for redeeming me. I will talk to others all day long about your justice and your goodness.” **(Psalm 71:22-24, TLB)**

Worship helps us to **CELEBRATE** God.

“Sing GOD a brand-new song!
Earth and everyone in it, sing!
Sing to GOD—*worship* GOD!

For God is great, and worth a thousand Hallelujahs.

Bravo, GOD, Bravo!
Everyone join in the great shout: Encore!
In awe before the beauty, in awe before the might.

Bring gifts and celebrate,
Bow before the beauty of GOD,
Then to your knees—everyone worship!
Get out the message—God Rules!

Let’s hear it from Sky,
With Earth joining in,
And a huge round of applause from Sea.

Let Wilderness turn cartwheels,
Animals, come dance,
Put every tree of the forest in the choir...” **(Psalm 96: 1-2, 4, 7-12, The Message)**

Worship helps you receive spiritual **ENCOURAGEMENT** and energy.

We can learn *how* to worship from Jesus' words in the Bible:

"True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. The father is looking for those who will worship him that way. For God is Spirit, so those who worship him must worship in spirit and in truth." (**John 4:23-24, NLT**)

To worship God in truth is to worship Him as He **REALLY** is.

Worship isn't merely an emotional or experiential event, but also a cerebral one. It involves thinking rightly about God.

To worship God in spirit is to worship with all your **HEART**.

We can worship God through **MUSIC**, personalizing the words we sing as our own.

We can worship God with our **BODIES**.

"I lift up my hands toward your Most Holy Place." (**Psalm 28:2, NIV**)

"I spread out my hands to you." (**Psalm 88:9, NIV**)

"The people all stood up. ... All the people lifted their hands and responded, 'Amen! Amen!' Then they bowed down and worshiped the Lord with their faces to the ground." (**Nehemiah 8:5-6, NIV**)

God encourages us to use our bodies to express ourselves in worship.

We can worship God through certain acts or **EVENTS**.

Ex: the giving of an offering, reading the Bible, dancing, performing arts, etc.

BAPTISM AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

There are two special worship events commanded by Jesus: baptism and the Lord's Supper

Baptism is one of the clearest demonstrations of your new life as a Christian.

"By our baptism, then, we were buried with him and shared his death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from death... so also we might live a new life." (**Romans 6:4, GNT**)

Baptism is the outward sign of an inward commitment you've already made to God.

Every Christian should be baptized and only needs to once.

The Lord's Supper (aka Communion) is an ongoing worship event.

It has its roots in the Jewish **PASSOVER** festival, which commemorated God's deliverance of the Israelite people from their slavery in Egypt.

By sacrificing a lamb and spreading its blood over their doorposts, the Israelites were able to avoid the 10th plague sent by God upon the Egyptians - the death of the firstborn son.

The Jewish people continue to celebrate Passover by eating a lamb, unleavened bread and bitter herbs. A cup of wine is set aside for the coming Messiah.

The night before His death, Jesus celebrated Passover with His disciples, but told them the elements would have new symbolism.

Jesus would be sacrificed for them, so it would be His blood that freed them from their bondage (to sin). And He drank the reserved cup of wine, claiming Himself to be the awaited Messiah.

Jesus then commanded all Christians to celebrate the Passover as fulfilled by Him.

Group Discussion

1. How do you most commonly enjoy worshipping God?
2. How can we focus our hearts and minds on God during times of worship so that we do not become distracted by other things or simply go through the motions without any devotion?
3. Have you been baptized? If so, share about that experience for you. If not, what hesitations do you have?

SERVING OTHERS

A key way in which we can make a difference with our lives is by serving others.

We are sons and daughters of Christ who are called to live as saints by becoming **SERVANTS** of others.

Jesus modeled servanthood for His followers.

For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." **(Mark 10:45, NIV)**

Serving puts you through a spiritual **WORKOUT**.

Serving consistently builds your faith and equips you to grow in Christ.

Serving gets you into the **GAME**.

“For we are God’s masterpiece. He has created us anew in Christ Jesus, so we can do the good things he planned for us long ago.” (**Ephesians 2:10, NLT**)

When you get off the sidelines and become a player for God, rather than just spectate from the sidelines, what God is doing becomes a lot more important to you.

Serving enables you to make a **DIFFERENCE** in this world.

Serving amplifies your **IMPACT**.

Not having to be in the spotlight frees you up to support countless endeavors for Christ.

Despite its many rewards, serving can be challenging.

“You know, Lord, how I serve You
With great emotional fervor
In the limelight.
You know how eagerly I speak for You
At a women’s club.
You know how I effervesce when I promote
A fellowship group.
You know my genuine enthusiasm
At a Bible study.
But how would I react, I wonder
If You pointed to a basin of water
And asked me to wash the calloused feet
Of a bent and wrinkled old woman
Day after day
Month after month
In a room where nobody saw
And nobody knew.” (Ruth Harms Calkins)

YOUR SHAPE

Learning about your SHAPE can help you determine where and how you should serve.

S - Spiritual Gifts

H - Heart

A - Abilities

P - Personality

E - Experience

God made you **UNIQUE** for a reason.

Spiritual Gifts

At least one spiritual gift is a given to every believer by the Holy Spirit.

A spiritual gift is a supernatural **ABILITY** to develop a particular **CAPABILITY** for the cause of Christ.

There's a wide variety of spiritual gifts (ex: leadership, teaching, hospitality, wisdom, encouragement, mercy, etc.).

If you don't know what your gift is, consider taking the spiritual gifts assessment via the QR code found on page 53.

Heart

Your heart has to do with your **PASSIONS**.

The difference between an interest and a passion is that passions drive you to act.

Consider what grips you and inspires you into action.

Abilities

These are your **NATURAL** talents and skills.

Personality

Your internal makeup and disposition was handcrafted by God and can complement how you serve others.

Experiences

Your life experiences (good or bad) can be used to serve others going through similar experiences.

Your spiritual gifts and abilities can tell you **WHAT** to do.

Your heart and experiences can tell you **WHERE** to do it.

Your personality can tell you **HOW** to do it.



WEEK 3 HOMEWORK

For homework, you'll review the concepts we discussed in Lesson 3 - community, worship and service.

1. Take a few moments to do a relational inventory of the people in your life. In the space below, jot down a few names of people God has already put in your life who encourage you toward God. Likewise, consider the people in your life who seem to call you away from God.
2. Either privately or corporately, try out a new form of worship. This might include a different type of music, using your body in worship, or participating in a worship event. Record your experience in the space below.
3. Read the article on the pages 38-39 and answer the questions that follow.
4. Take some time to consider your SHAPE. Using the table on the next page, record aspects of your SHAPE that might be helpful in guiding the way you serve others.



SPIRITUAL GIFTS	<p><i>What are your top three spiritual gifts?</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1.2.3.
HEART	<p><i>What motivates you to action?</i></p> <p><i>Who are the people you most want to help?</i></p> <p><i>What needs do you most want to meet?</i></p>
ABILITIES	<p><i>What natural talents do you have?</i></p> <p><i>What skills have you developed?</i></p>
PERSONALITY	<p><i>Do you prefer doing things for people or being with people?</i></p> <p><i>Do you tend to be more reserved or more outgoing? Goal-oriented or people-oriented?</i></p>
EXPERIENCES	<p><i>What key experiences have impacted you in these areas?</i></p> <p><i>Family</i></p> <p><i>Faith</i></p> <p><i>Education</i></p> <p><i>Career</i></p>



POSITIONING YOUR HEART

As we continue to learn about what the Christian life is all about and how we can live in such a way that positions us to be transformed by and used by God, we have to take a look at what the Bible says about money. This topic may seem unimportant in the bigger scope of what we have learned so far, but the truth is that there are more verses in the Bible about money than there are about heaven and hell combined. In other words, money matters to God - a lot - because of it can either draw us closer to Him or far away from Him, depending on how we understand it.

In a single story that Jesus told, recorded in Matthew 25:14-27, we find four important principles about money and how we should prioritize it in our lives. The story tells of a wealthy man who was preparing to take a long trip. Before he left, he gathered three servants and entrusted each of them with varying amounts of money while he was gone. The charge was for them to be smart with his money. When the man returned, he was pleased to find that two of his servants had indeed doubled the investment given to them. The other servant, however, simply buried the master's money to not lose it. Needless to say, the rich man was not so pleased with the one who had not made any attempt to invest his money for gain.

Drawing a parallel between the rich man and God, the first principle we learn is that God owns it all. Our health, our intelligence, our abilities - they all come from God. And not only do they come from God, but they also *belong* to God. We are like the servants who have been entrusted by God with His money and the ability to make money, that we might be wise with them. That implies that every spending decision is a spiritual decision. We should not be asking, "God, what do you want me to do with *my* money?" Rather, we should ask, "God, what do you want me to do with *your* money?"

A second principle we glean from the story is that the amount of money we have is not important. In the story, the rich man gave the servants different amounts of money but his response of positivity toward those who had doubled his investment was the same. God is not concerned with the amount we are managing, but the management process itself. It's a matter of faithfulness.

This leads to the third major principle for money management: We are accountable to God for our use of His money. In the story, there came a time when the servants had to stand before their master and explain how they had



handled His money. Similarly, we will be held accountable to God for how we handle the good gifts He has entrusted us to steward.

The final principle we learn from the story is that money is a life test. The only person who was found lacking in the story was the one who knew what was expected of him but didn't do it. When it comes to our time, our talents, our money, and our resources, we have all been given a little bit for a very short amount of time. If we manage it well, we will be entrusted with more - not just in this life, but in the life to come. The problem is that too often, we view money not as a life test, but as life itself.

Where in life you invest what God has given you is determined by where you have placed your heart. If your heart is attached to the things of this world, it will impact your decisions and, in turn, your heart. But if you want your heart to be with God, then your treasure will be with God. This is why Jesus famously said, "You cannot serve God and be enslaved to money" (Matthew 6:24, NLT). There is only one true God operating in your world. One true leader. So, every Christian must settle the important question, "Who is your leader?", not only in matters of theology but in matters of money.

IN RESPONSE:

1. Of the four principles discussed, which most resonated with you? Why?

2. How does the story Jesus told give you insight into the amount of money that you have?

3. When it comes to spending money, how might you cultivate the discipline of making that a spiritual decision?

WEEK 4

WEEKS 1-3 RECAP

- The moment you said “I believe” to God, you became His son or daughter as well as a saint. Embracing that new identity is the only way to keep yourself focused on the relational aspect of the Christian life instead of being deceived by a works-based, ritualistic approach.
- Talking with God in prayer helps us to orient our lives around what God wants for us. For that reason, spending intentional time with God every day - reading the Bible and praying - is so beneficial to our relationship with God and our mission.
- The Christian life involves community. All Christ-followers should be a part of a local church where they can worship together, serve others and make a difference in the world.

Group Discussion

1. For homework, you were challenged to engage worship in a new way. Share with your groups what you tried new and how that went for you.
2. As you took time to consider the people in your life who might encourage you along in your Christian life, who came to mind? What action steps do you plan to take to make those relationships more intentional?
3. What did you learn about yourself by studying your SHAPE? What direction did that provide you in terms of how you might serve others?

SHARING YOUR FAITH

The only way we can have maximum impact on another human life is by introducing them to Christ.

But talking to others about your faith can feel awkward or intimidating. Hesitation toward evangelism can reveal a personal lack of empathy for the eternal destiny of others or misaligned priorities regarding what truly matters in life.

Why we must tell others about Jesus:

1. Heaven and hell are **REAL** places, and **REAL** people go there.

“If you believe that there’s a heaven and hell and that people could be going to hell... how much do you have to hate someone to not [talk to them about it]?” (Penn Jillette)

Jesus didn’t tell people about hell to threaten them, but rather with a desperation to keep people **OUT** of it.

Jesus knew that hell was a real place and that whether we go there or to heaven is based on decisions we make in *this* life. In other words, there is a real sense of urgency.

Once we come face to face with the reality of hell, it’s hard not to want to share your faith with others (see Luke 16:19-28).

2. Sharing our faith should matter to us because it mattered to **JESUS**.

Jesus’ sacrifice on the cross reveals the lengths God was willing to go so that hell does not need to be our eternal destiny.

“Because we understand our fearful responsibility to the Lord, we work hard to persuade others.... So we are Christ’s ambassadors; God is making his appeal through us. We speak for Christ when we plead, ‘Come back to God!’” **(2 Corinthians 5:11, 20 NLT)**

The core dynamic of evangelism is investing and inviting.

Investing involves **BUILDING** a relationship with someone.

But just having relationships isn’t the end goal. We must intentionally **SERVE** those relationships as someone who is on mission.

Within the context of a relationship, you’ll have opportunities to invite others to come and **SEE**, come and **HEAR**, come and **EXPERIENCE**.

“The following day John was again standing with two of his disciples. As Jesus walked by, John looked at him and declared, ‘Look! There is the Lamb of God!’ When John’s two disciples heard this, they followed Jesus.

Jesus looked around and saw them following. ‘What do you want?’ he asked them.

They replied, ‘Rabbi’ (which means “Teacher”), ‘where are you staying?’

‘Come and see,’ he said. It was about four o’clock in the afternoon when they went with him to the place where he was staying, and they remained with him the rest of the day.

Andrew, Simon Peter’s brother, was one of these men who heard what John said and then followed Jesus. Andrew went to find his brother, Simon, and told him, ‘We have found the Messiah’ (which means “Christ”).

Then Andrew brought Simon to meet Jesus. Looking intently at Simon, Jesus said, 'Your name is Simon, son of John—but you will be called Cephas' (which means "Peter").

The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, 'Come, follow me.' Philip was from Bethsaida, Andrew and Peter's hometown.

Philip went to look for Nathanael and told him, 'We have found the very person Moses and the prophets wrote about! His name is Jesus, the son of Joseph from Nazareth.'

'Nazareth!' exclaimed Nathanael. 'Can anything good come from Nazareth?'

'Come and see for yourself,' Philip replied." **(John 1:35-46, NLT)**

A recent study found that **80** percent of our friends would come to church if we invited them.

Group Discussion

1. Think back on your own spiritual journey. Were there any people in your life who played a major role in that? Share about one of those people with your group.
2. What are your hesitations, fears or obstacles when it comes to sharing your faith with others? And how might what we talked about today address them?

THE HOLY SPIRIT

Similarly to Jesus' resurrection, we are given the chance to be born anew when we put our faith in Jesus.

When Jesus was resurrected, there was a mighty **POWER** at work.

"[You need to] understand the incredible greatness of God's power for us who believe him. This is the same mighty power that raised Christ from the dead." **(Ephesians 1:19-20, NLT)**

That same power is made available to us. We are able to be resurrected from the dead **NOW** spiritually, given new life in any area of lifelessness within us.

In order to experience that power in our lives, we must keep in step with the **HOLY SPIRIT**.

Important truths about the Holy Spirit:

1. The Holy Spirit is **GOD**, the third person of the Trinity.

Although He has His own unique role and ministry, the Holy Spirit shares all of the attributes of God.

2. The Holy Spirit is **PERSONAL**.

The Holy Spirit is not an "it", but rather a "He."

He has a mind, feelings and a will. He thinks, grieves, makes decisions, etc.

3. The Holy Spirit is **IN YOU**.

The Holy Spirit embodies anyone who invites Jesus into their life. From within, He changes you.

His single focus: to make you more like Jesus.

We cannot become like Jesus without the help of the Holy Spirit.

Although all Christ-followers have the Holy Spirit within them, not all of us are living in conjunction with Him. In other words, while you have the Spirit *in* your life, how much does the Holy Spirit have *of* your life?

Coming to Christ is not the same as **STAYING** in Christ, much less **GROWING** in Christ.

We must cultivate a new way of life that **CONSISTENTLY** draws from the Holy Spirit.

Since the Holy Spirit is a person, we must invest in our relationship with Him, allowing Him to occupy, guide and control more and more areas of our lives.

By listening to the Holy Spirit and following His lead, we will find that He is able to transform us increasingly more like Jesus.

The Holy Spirit not only provides guidance, but also the raw **POWER** that we need to be obedient to God.

When we try to become like Jesus by means of sheer willpower, we reject the Holy Spirit and diminish His power in our lives. We also hurt our relational intimacy with God.

Group Discussion

1. Of God's triune components - God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit - is there one you tend to relate to more than others? Less? Explain.
2. Have you ever been prompted by the Holy Spirit to do or say something? If so, how did you respond?
3. What have you learned today about the Holy Spirit that really resonated with you?

WRAP UP

Encounter #1:

"As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, 'I will follow you wherever you go.'

Jesus replied, 'Foxes have dens and birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.'" **(Luke 9:57-58, NIV)**

This man seemed quick and eager to want to follow Jesus, but Jesus knew that He was headed to the **CROSS**.

Following Jesus involves sacrifice, duty and commitment.

Encounter #2:

"He said to another man, 'Follow me.'

But he replied, 'Lord, first let me go and bury my father.'

Jesus said to him, 'Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.'" **(Luke 9:59-60, NIV)**

This man wanted to follow Jesus, but later on when it was more convenient.

The man insinuated that there are some concerns and responsibilities more **IMPORTANT** than following Jesus.

Encounter #3:

“Still another said, ‘I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say goodbye to my family.’

Jesus replied, ‘No one who puts a hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God.’” **(Luke 9:61-62, NIV)**

This man added a **CONDITION** regarding the degree to which he would follow Jesus.

To follow Jesus means that your heart is **FULLY** His, not divided in its loyalties.

It’s as if Jesus said: “You’re wanting just enough spirituality to feel good about yourself, but not enough to change your life. That’s not what this is about.”

The call to follow Jesus is a lifelong commitment that is renewed every day.

“But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them garbage, that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith.” **(Philippians 3:7-9, NIV)**

YOUR FINAL CHALLENGE:

Don’t take your one and only life and *almost* live for Jesus. Instead, *completely* live your one and only life for Him.

YOUR NEXT STEPS



Sometime in the next couple of weeks, take some time to review your notes from this class. The goal is not to walk away with a long list of “to-do”s, but rather with a fuller understanding of where you’re headed and how you can stay faithful to God along the path to becoming more like Jesus.

In the space below, jot down the three most important things you learned in this class:

1.

2.

3.

Then, take some time to reflect on what action steps God might be calling you to. List 1-2 next steps you need to incorporate in your life to help better position you to follow Him.

1.

2.



APPENDIX: BIBLE BACKGROUND

There is a LOT to discover about the Bible, but here are four major headlines to get you started:

1. It is a library.

- The Bible is a collection of 66 books, written by 40 authors, covering a period of approximately 1,500 years.
- Most of the books bear the name of their author (ex: the book of Isaiah was written by the prophet Isaiah). Sometimes the books carry the name of a major event (ex: the book of Exodus describes the *exodus*, or departure, of the Israelites from Egypt). And a lot of the books are letters and carry the name of the people they were sent to (ex: the letter of Philippians was written to the people who lived in the city of Philippi).

2. It has two Testaments.

- The Bible has two parts, usually called “testaments” - the Old Testament and the New Testament. The word *testament* means “agreement” or “covenant”, and biblically speaking, it refers to the covenant and agreements God made with His people. Those He made with them before the time of Jesus are recorded in the Old Testament, and what came after Jesus is recorded in the New Testament.
- Even though the Bible contains 66 books and two parts, it tells one single cohesive story, all surrounding the person and work of Jesus Christ.

3. It is sacred.

- Christians accept the sacred nature of the Bible because Jesus did. Even the books written after Jesus died were written by men appointed and commissioned by Jesus, given special inspiration by the Spirit.
- In other words, we didn’t choose the books that are in the Bible. Jesus did by affirming the Scripture of the Old Testament and commissioning the Scripture of the New Testament.

4. It is inspired.

- The Bible is inspired; meaning, it was breathed by God, exhaled by God, produced by God. In other words, it is not a human book. Although humans wrote it, they were moved by God in their writing.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

This class was based on the book [*After "I Believe"* by James Emery White](#), the founding and senior pastor of Mecklenburg Community Church. For more in-depth information about any of the topics we discussed in class, we recommend you start with this book.

BIBLE STUDY RESOURCES

- [The Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary](#)
- [The Baker Illustrated Bible Handbook](#) or the [Holman Illustrated Bible Handbook](#)
- ["The Bible at a Glance" by Rose Publishing](#)
- ["The Complete Guide to the Bible" by Stephen Miller](#)
- ["The Essential Bible Companion" by John Walton, Mark Strauss & Ted Cooper](#)
- ["Learn to Study the Bible" by Andy Deane](#)
- ["Living by the Book" by Howard Hendricks](#)
- [Rose Book of Bible Charts](#) (various volumes available)

SPIRITUAL GIFTS ASSESSMENT

To find out what your spiritual gifts are, scan the QR code below to take you to a Spiritual Gifts Assessment provided by Mecklenburg Community Church.





NOTES:





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