


Steps to
Discipleship
PASTOR'S
MANUAL



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Steps to Discipleship Pastor's Manual

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INTRODUCTION

▷ WELCOME

Welcome to the *Steps to Discipleship (S2D)* strategy. Making disciples is one of Jesus' greatest commands. We cooperate with God when we help others walk with Him and also integrate Him into their lives in a greater way. This is also a partnership with the Holy Spirit. Our success can be found only as we open our hearts, abilities, and ministries as to His presence and power.

▷ PURPOSE

Steps to Discipleship is designed to help people grow through spending daily time with God and His Word. This strategy will provide a sequential series of decisions and life choices that will help move them into a growing discipleship walk with God. *S2D* seeks also to help individuals integrate Jesus as Lord of their hearts and lives.

▷ STRATEGY DESCRIPTION

Steps to Discipleship is a seven week strategy that integrates eight Sabbath sermons with seven weeks of systematic study and learning of key devotional skills or disciplines. Each Sabbath participants will explore a principle of spiritual growth and be given an invitation for a specific decision that helps to move them forward in their spiritual journey.

Each individual has a *Participant's Manual* as a personal resource and study guide. Those who participate are challenged to spend 30-45 minutes of devotional time each day to study and reflect on key Scriptures and begin the process of integrating them into their lives.

KEY COMPONENTS

The *S2D* materials include the following elements:

▷ PASTOR'S MANUAL

The *Pastor's Manual* includes everything pastors need to lead out in the *Steps to Discipleship* strategy, including 1) the philosophy undergirding the overall strategy, 2) explanation of the strategy design, 3) sermons, and 4) other pastoral resources for implementing the complete strategy.

As the pastor, you will need to adapt the sermons and make them your own. Whenever possible use your own illustrations. Each sermon resource has three components: 1) a page defining the purpose of the sermon with the key points and passages for that sermon; 2) an outline for each sermon which can be adapted as a handout for the congregation; and 3) an edited transcript of the original sermon preached the first time these materials were used. You

can also develop your own sermon, but it should go along with the core concept of study for the following week.

▷ PROMOTIONAL PACKAGE

The promotional package for the *S2D* strategy includes the following:

- **A PROMOTIONAL BROCHURE AND POSTCARD** which can be used when presenting the strategy to the Church Board, as well as with the congregation to help recruit their involvement. The brochure should be used several weeks prior to starting *S2D* to help your congregation prepare for the seven-week strategy. It is available through the same source as the manuals.
- **A TESTIMONIAL DVD** video of interviews with individuals who participated in a *S2D* strategy sharing how they were blessed by opening their lives to God. This video can be used with the Church Board when first voting on the strategy as well as with the congregation. Again this should be used several weeks in advance to help prepare the congregation ahead of time.
- **A STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP INFORMATION SHEET** which outlines the *S2D* strategy and its purpose in order to inform the Church Board about this strategy.
- **A PROMOTIONAL ARTICLE ENTITLED *THE ADVENTURE BEGINS*** which can be used as a newsletter article, a bulletin insert, or adapted as an invitation letter.

▷ PARTICIPANT'S MANUAL

The *Steps to Discipleship Participant's Manual* is the main resource for members to have and use throughout the seven weeks of the *S2D* strategy. Each member who wishes to take part in *S2D* should have a copy of the manual. We recommend that members be encouraged to pay for the manual as it will make it more valuable to each member. However, it would be good for you to establish a scholarship fund to help those members who may not be able to pay for their manuals. This manual provides a daily study guide that takes each participant deeper into the subject presented in the sermon each week that goes along with the sequential decisions for the *S2D* process. Each participant is encouraged to spend 30-45 minutes of study and reflection each day.

▷ SMALL GROUP LEADER'S GUIDE

A *Small Group Leader's Guide* is another element that is included in the materials as part of the *S2D* package and is designed to help those small groups who wish to work along with the individual study process. This *Guide* is presented as an optional element.

▷ PASTORAL RESOURCE CD

The final element that is part of the *S2D* package is a *Pastoral Resource CD*. This CD provides all the resources needed for the pastor to conduct the *S2D* strategy. Here is a list of these resources:

- **SERMON OUTLINES** that can be easily adapted as handouts for the congregation.
- **SERMON TRANSCRIPTS** that need to be adapted by pastors in order to make them their own if they choose to use the sermons.
- **SERMON POWERPOINT** files for each sermon that can be easily adapted by pastors.
- **THE STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP INFORMATION SHEET** to be used with the Church Board when voting on the *S2D* strategy.
- **A PROMOTIONAL ARTICLE** entitled *The Adventure Begins* to be used as a newsletter article, a bulletin insert, or adapted as an invitation letter.
- **A SIGN-UP SHEET** for using with the congregation to reserve Participant's Manuals for those planning on following the strategy.
- **THE SMALL GROUP LEADER'S GUIDE** which can be printed and shared with small group leaders.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP PHILOSOPHY

▷ GENERAL PHILOSOPHY

This opening section is designed to help you understand the undergirding philosophy for the *S2D* strategy and materials. Please read through this section carefully. It is important that you understand the philosophy behind the strategy.

There is a growing spiritual hunger in our world. Christians and non-Christians alike are searching for spiritual meaning and fulfillment. This search manifests itself in many different ways. Some people try harder—doing more of the religious things they have done in the past. Others turn to non-traditional sources for answers, hoping to discover some significant secret that will change their lives to satisfy their hunger. The topic of spirituality and related issues are some of the most frequent web searches on the internet.

At the same time many individuals are experiencing a growing dissatisfaction with where they find themselves spiritually. Some have given up on institutional Christianity, seeing the established church as a failure that is simply a religious club that has lost its relevance and meaning. They hope there is something more.

S2D seeks to help satisfy that hunger by opening lives to God's presence. It also seeks to help people find a new and deeper walk with God by building new habits and opening one's life to a new discipleship relationship with Jesus.

▷ SPIRITUAL FOUNDATIONS

This strategy is based on two key spiritual principles that provide the spiritual understanding for the key ingredients of these materials. We seek to cooperate with God when implementing this strategy.

THE FIRST is God's promise that we would find Him when we seek Him with all our hearts (Deuteronomy 4:29; Proverbs 8:17; and Jeremiah 29:13). In reality, when we go searching for Him we discover that He was already searching for us. In fact, our very hunger for God is the result of the Holy Spirit working in our lives.

THE SECOND SPIRITUAL PRINCIPLE is found in Jesus' power to attract or draw us to Himself (John 12:32). When we lift Him up—when we study His story, Christ draws us. He is constantly working through the Holy Spirit to attract us.

▷ PSYCHO-LOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

There are two psychological principles that help shape the *S2D* strategy. These are in line with the way people think and function.

THE FIRST PRINCIPLE is that people resist making a long term commitment while they are more willing to make a short term commitment with a definite closure date. The seven week duration for *S2D* is based on this concept along with the seven important decisions built into this strategy as most people are willing to try something for six or seven weeks.

THE SECOND PSYCHOLOGICAL PRINCIPLE is that it takes only five to six weeks to develop a habit and firmly integrate it into our lives. Thus spending seven weeks of daily time with God and His Word will help people build the habit of a regular devotional life or strengthen their existing devotional lives.

The *S2D* strategy seeks to introduce people to a lifestyle that can transform them over time. The seven weeks of *S2D* may seem insignificant, however, this may begin a transformation process that will change lives. In fact, countless people have found these seven weeks to be a significant turning point in their spiritual journey.

▷ DEFINING DISCIPLESHIP

Jesus commanded us to make disciples (Matthew 28:18-20). It is one of His clearest and most direct commands. Therefore, this task is not one we can assume lightly. It is the church's clearest purpose, and it is our greatest need. There is far too little difference between the average Christian and the non-Christian in the world around us. There are few Christians who have a dynamic, vibrant walk with God that controls their lives and thoughts. All indicators of serious discipleship—things such as regular time with God, lifestyle, and biblical thinking are declining. Discipleship is the secret to and desired outcome of our spiritual ministry.

Discipleship is as simple as learning to walk with Jesus and making disciples can be as simple as learning to walk with Jesus to help someone else walk with Him.

For our context, I want to define a disciple as **ONE WHO WALKS WITH, LEARNS FROM, AND LIVES IN SUBMISSION TO JESUS AS MASTER IN ORDER TO BECOME LIKE HIM**. The process of Biblical discipling is the art of shaping the life of an individual into growing partnership with God. It begins with the **ASSURANCE** of salvation through the **ACCEPTANCE** of the Gospel, and then continues **INTEGRATING** Christ's lordship into every area of daily life.

▷ DESCRIBING A DISCIPLE

As we look at Scripture, we find five key points that describe a disciple:

- **DISCIPLES HAVE A GROWING PASSION FOR JESUS.** We have been God's consuming passion for more than 6,000 years, and He calls us to love Him the way He loves us—passionately. Disciples grow in their love for God, and this love becomes the dominant controlling factor in their lives. Jesus said we are to love God with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength (Mark 12:30). Thus He built on a clear Old Testament concept (Deuteronomy 6:5; 13:3; 30:6). To the degree that He is not our consuming passion we will practice some form of idolatry for someone or something will be our passion.
- **DISCIPLES MAINTAIN INTIMACY WITH GOD THROUGH DAILY DEVOTIONAL LIVES.** The level of passion in any relationship is in direct proportion to the level of intimacy. Christians, growing as disciples, build intimacy through daily time in prayer, Bible study, Scripture memorization, and meditation, as well as through the practice of other spiritual disciplines.
- **DISCIPLES INTEGRATE GOD INTO EVERY AREA OF LIFE.** This is a second level of intimacy. A marriage needs two forms of intimacy—the physical and the sharing of life together. Without either of these, the passion will grow cold. It is the same in the walk with God. It is not enough to have just a devotional life—the first level of intimacy. We also need the second level of intimacy of inviting God to share every part of our lives. In this way intimacy and passion grow in the relationship with God.
- **DISCIPLES MAKE GOD A PRIORITY IN EVERY DECISION.** If God is really God, then He is the most important factor in every area of life. When we leave Him out of decision-making, we are the ones in control. Therefore, disciples use their will to choose, obey, and follow God. They submit to Christ's lordship, seeking to align their lives with God's will through giving Him room to work in them to produce obedient lives.
- **DISCIPLES ACTIVELY SHARE CHRIST WITH THOSE IN THEIR SPHERE OF INFLUENCE.** This does not mean the ability to explain all doctrines or answer all questions. It simply means sharing the testimony of what God has done in our lives. This testimony focuses on knowing Jesus and how that experience has changed our lives.

▷ DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS

We need to remember that discipleship is a process or journey—not an event, program, or destination. As such, this journey will be unique to each individual. Yet there are five common or typical stages in the process that we discover as we study Scripture and the spiritual

growth experienced by Christ's followers. These stages are sequential and cumulative—each stage builds on the previous one. As we grow, we may move from one stage to another and operate or live in different stages with different circumstances. The mature disciple functions best when all the stages are at work at the same time.

- **WATCHING** — (John 1:39; Hebrews 12:1-3) Watching or observing is the first stage in the discipleship journey. Jesus invited those who were interested in Him to first “Come and see.” Paul encourages us to look to Jesus as the “founder and perfecter of our faith.” We are attracted to Jesus when we watch or look to Him.
- **FOLLOWING** — (John 1:43; Mark 1:17) The second stage in the discipleship growth process is to choose to follow Jesus. Repeatedly Jesus invited people to follow Him—to choose to dedicate their lives to following His steps.
- **ABIDING** — (Mark 3:14) The next stage in the discipleship journey is to learn to abide with Jesus. Christ's invitation to “be with Him” is one of the most powerful invitations in Scripture. He wants companions, not mere followers or imitators. He wants friends—he even calls us “friends” (John 15:12-15).
- **INDWELLING** — (John 14:16-20; Colossians 1:27; Ephesians 3:16-19) The most powerful and life-transforming stage in the discipleship process is when we allow Christ to dwell in us. Christ desires an intimate union with us where our lives are transformed from within by His empowering presence. This is the secret of effective Christianity and mature discipleship.
- **LIVING OUT** — (Philippians 2:12-13; Hebrews 13:20-21) As we grow in our discipleship journey we discover that Christ begins to produce or “live out” His will in and through us. True obedience comes not from our effort to produce right behavior, but from our choosing to yield each and every part of our lives to His transforming power. Thus, obedience or doing His will is but the natural byproduct of our relationship with Him. This is the final or mature discipleship stage where all other stages are working together to produce the maturing Christian life.

It is important for us to understand that the life of a disciple who is growing in his or her relationship with Jesus will experience and demonstrate a fruitful life of obedience, spiritual growth, and helping others become disciples. But that production or fruit is not the result of one's own ability or effort. Instead it is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit working in the disciple's life—recreating the very life and character of Christ in the disciple.

▷ GENERAL POINTS

There are two primary discipleship tools—the spiritual disciplines and biblical truth. Spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, fasting, and meditation serve to open one's heart and mind to God and to integrate Him into our lives. Biblical truth, understood in a relational context provides the vision of God and information about Him that can inspire and shape our lives. It also provides the principles and boundaries that can shape and guide our discipleship journey.

Discipleship takes place in the context of a caring community, spiritual friendships, and expectant openness to God. Discipleship is not a solo experience. Instead, it is a journey together to the heart of God, walking beside and helping each other. While there is a place for solitude as a discipline to help one draw closer to God, the overall spiritual journey takes place within loving relationships—the ultimate sign of Christ’s disciples in how they love each other (John 13:35). This caring community finds its strongest expression in spiritual friendships where we are able to open our hearts to each other and journey together in the kingdom of God.

As disciples, we can expect God to do something unique and powerful in each of our lives. He has promised to be with us, and He declares that if we are in Him we are a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Discipleship is about a certainty to God’s promises and faithfulness, not mere hope or wishful thinking. It means taking God at His word and expecting Him to do His work in our hearts and lives.

▷ DISCIPLESHIP PRINCIPLES

There are a number of important points to remember as we enter into a discipleship ministry and this strategy.

- **THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE ONE WHO CHANGES HEARTS.** It is easy to slip in the illusion that we can change others. Yet it is only an exercise in guilt and frustration for everyone involved. God has promised to recreate us and give us new hearts (Ezekiel 26:26-27), and He uses the Holy Spirit to accomplish this transformation. As we enter the S2D we can trust Him to do His work.
- **THE HOLY SPIRIT IS THE ONE WHO EMPOWERS CHANGE AND GROWTH.** Through the Holy Spirit, God brings the living presence of Jesus into our lives to empower a completely new life. He produces both the desire and ability to live out authentic discipleship (Philippians 2:12-13).
- **THE HOLY SPIRIT PROVIDES THE ONLY APPROPRIATE MOTIVATION FOR DISCIPLING.** We cannot enter a discipleship ministry while focusing on our own abilities or seeking credit or glory for ourselves. The call to make disciples is fulfilled in the context of Christ’s promise to be with us and to provide the power for this critical ministry. We respond to His invitation to partner with Him in the ministry of helping others grow and walk with Jesus.
- **AT BEST, WE HELP PEOPLE OPEN THEIR LIVES TO THE HOLY SPIRIT THROUGH EXPERIENCES, INFORMATION, AND SKILLS.** Discipling focuses on the three key areas of 1) experiencing God, 2) learning about Him and what our life with Him can be, and 3) learning the devotional skills which will open our lives to God.
- **WE CAN ONLY LEAD FROM OUR OWN EXPERIENCE.** Our own discipleship walk with God is the foundation for working with others. We can only teach that which we have experienced and know.

- **PERSONAL TESTIMONY IS A POWERFUL TOOL IN DISCIPLING.** Our story of what Jesus has done for us is one of our greatest tools in discipling others. And our testimony needs to be fresh and new.
- **DISCIPLING IS A PROCESS—NOT AN EVENT OR A DESTINATION.** It is easy to focus on events and programs, forgetting that the Christian walk is not a place of arrival but an ongoing journey with Jesus Christ. Thus *S2D* seeks to focus on the process of making disciples more than on the final product. After all, the final product will be finished only in the Kingdom when Jesus comes.
- **WE ARE PILGRIMS TOGETHER ON THE DISCIPLESHIP JOURNEY.** Leading a discipleship ministry is to a great degree a peer ministry. We walk together in our journey with God, and we help each other as we grow. The Holy Spirit is the one who is in control of the process and lives. There is only one Master, and we must remember that our purpose and ministry is to point others to Him.

STRATEGY DESIGN

▷ KEY DECISIONS

The *S2D* strategy is designed around a sequence of eight key decisions. These eight decisions lead the individual through a natural progression or growth into a more open relationship with God. They help growing disciples choose to integrate God more fully into their lives. Here are these decisions:

- **CHOOSE TO SEEK GOD.** The first decision is the choice to commit to seven weeks of study and reflection following the *S2D* strategy. We explain that it will require a commitment of 30-45 minutes a day for seven weeks. We invite participants to try God and see if He won't make a difference in their lives. Take Him at His Word and test Him.
- **ACCEPT JESUS AS SAVIOR.** The second decision is to choose to accept Jesus Christ as one's personal Savior. This means we recognize our sin, confess it to God, believing that Jesus died to forgive and save us from our sin. It means believing 1 John 5:13 that we can know that we have eternal life. It means accepting the assurance of our salvation in Jesus.
- **ACCEPT JESUS AS LORD.** This is a major choice in life, but we will never accept Jesus as Lord of our lives unless we have the assurance of knowing Him as Savior. At the same time, accepting Him as Lord is the natural follow up to accepting Him as Savior. In reality, we cannot have Him as Savior if we do not also accept Him as Savior, for if He is not Lord, our reliance on self will move us away from Him as Savior.
- **ACCEPT THE INDWELLING CHRIST.** This fourth decision is the secret to a powerful Christian life. We were not intended to live the Christian life in our own strength. God has promised to fill us with the very presence of Christ (Ezekiel 36:25-27; John 14:16-20; Ephesians 3:16-19; and Philippians 2:12-13). He is the one who transforms us and empower the daily Christian life from beginning to end. This is the most important of all the decisions for it is what integrates and makes Christ's Lordship work.

- **ACCEPT THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION.** This fifth decision moves from the disciple's inner focus to an outward implementation of sharing what we have experienced. The preceding decisions lead us to the place where we know enough and have experienced enough of God to be able to share with someone else and help lead them to Christ. We are called to represent God in this incredible ministry of reconciliation—bringing God and man together.
- **ACCEPT THE CHURCH AS THE BODY OF CHRIST.** The sixth in the sequence of decisions moves disciples further to looking beyond themselves to what it means to be part of the corporate church as the Body of Christ. With this decision we begin to explore relationships with fellow believers and the ways in which we reflect God's love to the world around us.
- **ACCEPT ONE'S CALL TO MINISTRY AND ONE'S SPIRITUAL GIFTS.** This seventh decision recognizes that every Christian, every disciple receives spiritual gifts for ministry, and we are called to use those gifts in fulfilling the ministry to which God has called us.
- **CHOOSE DISCIPLESHIP AS A LIFESTYLE.** The final decision is to recognize that God has blessed during the previous seven weeks and make it a lifestyle.

▷ MATERIAL DESIGN

The *S2D* material design is a combination of information, skills, and experience. The information is a sequence of biblical principles and practices that help us grow as disciples. This also includes learning spiritual disciplines or devotional skills that open our lives to God or help us integrate Him into new areas of life. This means not only learning about these skills, but also putting them to work in ways that help us experience God's presence.

Daily and systematic Bible study is another key element of the material. This study is a combination of reading, study, and reflection to help assimilate biblical truth into daily thought and practice through personal application.

Through it all, prayer is a key ingredient in the success of this discipleship strategy. The entire church needs to be praying during the preparation time leading up to the seven week *S2D* strategy, and throughout the seven weeks. It is important that the entire process be bathed in prayer. Prayer is also an important part of the participants as they work through the seven weeks. That is why prayer is incorporated into the materials.

▷ PRIMARY ELEMENTS

The two key elements of this strategy are the eight sermons and the daily study guide or *Participant's Manual*. Small groups can be a strong support to this discipleship process, and that is why there is a *Small Group Leader's Guide* to go along with this material.

PROCESS GUIDELINES

Because *Steps to Discipleship* is a strategy designed as a process rather than an event or series of events, it is important that you prepare for the process and that you follow the process carefully. This includes the following key steps:

▷ PREPARATION PROCESS

The preparation stage for *S2D* is especially crucial. The pastor must begin to create a discipleship culture if one does not already exist. This means shifting the focus of the church and its ministry to focus on making disciples. This needs to be done through the church strategic planning process, systematic preaching on discipleship concepts, and leadership training. *S2D* should not be implemented as a stand-alone event.

The *S2D* strategy should also be presented to and voted by the Church Board well in advance of the scheduled dates for *S2D*. Use the *S2D Information Sheet*, and the testimonial DVD video provided in the package.

▷ PROMOTIONAL PROCESS

It is important that the *S2D* strategy be presented to the congregation over several weeks (four to six weeks) prior to the actual strategy dates. The materials for this promotion are included in the promotional package described on page 3 of this manual.

The promotional process needs to include a direct invitation from the pastor, as well as the promotional brochure, and testimonial DVD video.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP INFORMATION SHEET

▷ **CONCEPT**

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP IS a strategic initiative focused on radical discipleship and ways of integrating the faith walk with God into daily life.

▷ **RATIONALE**

1. An intentional discipling strategy is a critical and usually missing element in our evangelism process.
2. The acceptance of Jesus Christ as Savior and the assurance of salvation is the starting point of discipleship.
3. Discipling is built on processes to integrate Christ into daily life.
4. Abiding in Christ is the key to effective discipleship.
5. A regular devotional life is the source of growth for discipleship.

▷ **FOUNDATIONAL PRINCIPLES**

There are four key philosophical points or principles which form the foundation for this strategy:

- God's promise that we will find Him when we seek Him.
- If we lift up Christ, He will draw people to Him.
- People are afraid of a long term commitment, but are willing to try something for a short term.
- If we do something for six to seven weeks, we develop a habit.

▷ **DESIRED OUTCOMES**

- A better and closer walk with God.
- Assurance of salvation.
- Acceptance of Jesus Christ as Lord.
- Acceptance of the reality of the indwelling Christ.
- Development of basic devotional skills or spiritual disciplines.
- Expanded prayer life.
- Commitment to discipleship.

STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP INFORMATION SHEET

▷ KEY ELEMENTS —

1. Multi-level sequential commitments
 - a. Accept the challenge of 50 days seeking God
 - b. Accept salvation as a gift
 - c. Accept the Lordship of Jesus Christ
 - d. Accept Holy Spirit
 - e. Accept call to witnessing ministry
 - f. Accept the Church as the Body of Christ
 - g. Accept call to spiritual gift ministry

2. Devotional skills
 - a. Relational Bible reading
 - b. Scripture memorization
 - c. Biblical meditation
 - d. Growing prayer life
 - e. Practicing the presence of God

▷ KEY COMPONENTS

- **EIGHT SERMONS** focusing on the call to seek God and walk with Him in beginning a discipleship process.
- The ***STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP PARTICIPANT'S MANUAL*** — this manual will provide daily readings and guides to Bible study which will follow up each of eight sermons, reaffirming the decisions made each Sabbath, and taking people deeper into understanding the discipleship elements from each Sabbath.
- The ***STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP PASTOR'S MANUAL*** (with accompanying Resource CD) to guide the pastor in preparing for and conducting a *Steps to Discipleship* strategy. This manual also provides all the resources needed to lead out in the *Steps to Discipleship* strategy.
- The ***STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP SMALL GROUP LEADER'S GUIDE*** — this will be a small booklet giving suggested processes, questions and discussion guides for small groups for each week. These studies will parallel the material from each Sabbath and that of the *Participant's Manual*. This booklet will be found in the pastor's Resource CD.
- Promotional material will include:
 - Promotional **BROCHURE** for church members (short term)
 - Promotional **POSTCARD** for church members (short term)
 - **DVD WITH TESTIMONIES** and strategy description

THE ADVENTURE BEGINS - *Ben Maxson*

Steps to Discipleship is about to begin. We need your support. We invite your involvement. This is an exciting, seven-week journey with God.

You and I were created for a relationship with God. We do not find our full identity or meaning in life except in a relationship with God. Yet much of the world around us interferes with that relationship with God. In fact, many of us long for a deeper closer walk with God. For many of us Christianity has become simply a cultural add-on to our lives.

If you are tired of the shallowness of your Christian journey, if you want something more in your walk with God, we invite you to plan on being part of the *Steps to Discipleship* adventure which will begin on Sabbath, _____.

Steps to Discipleship is a seven-week challenge to commit ourselves to seek for a deeper walk with God. We will have participants materials and a series of eight sermons that will lead us into a closer walk with God. This will be a corporate and a personal journey searching for a more intimate relationship with our God.

The *Steps to Discipleship* strategy was developed and implemented in a local church by a church pastor. The materials have been used to help people just like you grow in their walk with God. We are praying that God will use this special time together to help us grow closer to Him.

The promises are sure. God has promised that if we seek for Him with all our hearts, we will find Him (Jeremiah 29:13). Jesus stated, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32, NIV). So we are dedicating eight Sabbath's and seven weeks to claim these promises and seek for God. There will be opportunity for daily time with God, as well as for meeting together with a small group of friends to study and reflect on your relationship with God.

We invite you to begin preparing your hearts even now and pray that God will bless this special initiative with His presence and power. This is a time to seek for God and to walk with Him. Plan on being part of the *Steps to Discipleship* adventure.

▷ PURPOSE

This is the first of the eight *Steps to Discipleship* sermons, and its primary purpose is to introduce the strategy and invite individuals to participate. It seeks to do so by presenting the reality that God wants us to seek Him, and He promises that when we do, we will find Him.

Thus we want to present the challenge to try God for seven weeks and see if He won't make a difference in our lives.

▷ KEY PASSAGES

The key Biblical passages for this sermon are:

- Exodus 32-34
- Jeremiah 29:11-13
- Jeremiah 31:3
- Isaiah 41:10
- Matthew 28:20
- Deuteronomy 4:29
- John 12:32
- Colossians 3:1-3

▷ KEY POINTS

The key points which need to be presented in this sermon are:

- Our need for God.
- God's promises that we will find Him, that He draws us, and that He is with us.
- The challenge of seeking God.
- Focusing on Jesus.
- The key ingredients of *Steps to Discipleship*:
 - Daily time with God.
 - Daily decisions to give God greater room in our lives.
 - Accepting the fulfillment of God's promises.
- Our choice is to try God for seven weeks.

KEY “ISSUES”

- We are faced with:
 - The temporariness of life
 - The insecurity of physical assets
 - Our real need
- We are created for intimacy with God, and we are born with a hunger for God.
- God promises that when we seek for Him, we will find Him.
- Our challenge is to search for Him with all our hearts.
- Discipleship is our journey to know and walk with God.

FACING OUR “NEED”

- Life confronts us with:
 - Helpless
 - Hopeless
 - Alone
- We hunger for God:
 - By experience
 - By creation

LEARNING FROM “MOSES” (EXODUS 32-34)

- The context:
 - From Mt. Sinai to the golden calf
 - Command to go without God (33:1-6)
- Moses went into the presence of God. (33:7-13)
- God promised His presence. (33:14-17)
- Moses appealed—“Show me your glory.” (33:18)
- God’s glory is His character. (33:19; 34:5-7)
- Moses responded in worship. (33:8-10)

GOD “**PROMISES**”

- We can find Him. (Jeremiah 29:11-13)
- God draws us. (Jeremiah 31:3)
- God is with us. (Isaiah 41:10; Matthew 28:20)

“**TRYING**” GOD

- Seek God. (Deuteronomy 4:29)
- Focus on Jesus. (John 12:32; Colossians 3:1-3)
- *Steps to Discipleship*
 - Daily time with God—30-45 minutes.
 - Daily decisions to give God greater room in our lives.
 - Accepting the fulfillment of God’s promise.

PRACTICAL “**DECISIONS**”

- Choose to seek God first.
- Commit to daily time with God
- Claim reality of God’s presence with us.

The series that begins today and continues over the next seven weeks is designed to take us through seven sequential steps into a deeper discipleship relationship with God. Each Sabbath you will be faced with a major commitment, asking you to make a choice as to where you are in your relationship with God. I guarantee that if you will give God thirty or forty-five minutes a day to seek Him, you will come out at the end of these seven weeks closer to Him, with a more dynamic, more powerful relationship with Him than ever before. It is all dependent upon the opening of our hearts and lives to Jesus Christ. Let's pray.

Father, we thank you for your incredible love. We thank you for the privilege of worshipping you this morning, for the opportunity to be here together. We are your people, gathered in your name. Speak to our hearts and lead us to be like Jesus. We pray in His name. Amen.

(Please note: *This sermon was originally preached right after hurricane Katrina struck the gulf coast of the United States. I felt it was crucial to include slides of the destruction and comment on the catastrophe and use it as a spring board to address the greater need that each individual has for God. I suggest when you preach this sermon you use a contemporary crisis and move into the deep hunger and need that each of us has to know God.)*

There are other kinds of crises. Each one reminds us that we all are one breath away from eternity. So the question comes, where is our security? The insecurity of physical assets has been demonstrated many times and in many ways. How much good is the home that is gone and was not insured for flooding? I want to suggest this morning that our real need is not for physical shelter and safety. Our real need is for a relationship with God. I suggest that the real question is not where God was, but where are we with God? How are we facing the issues of life? You and I were created for friendship with God. We were created for relationship with God. We are born with a hunger for God. You will never be satisfied until you know God. In fact, many of the crazy things we do in our culture come from our desperate search for meaning in life that can only be answered when we discover our relationship with God. More than that, God promises that when we seek for Him we will find Him. Our challenge is to search for Him with all our hearts.

I confronted that question in a very real way. Is my search for God the most dominant, the most important part of my life? Or do I play the religious game of "doing Church" and being a "Christian," being a Seventh-day Adventist, being a pastor, and let the other things of life become the dominant focus of my thought patterns, of my decisions, of my priorities?

I ask us this morning as a congregation, "Are we ready to seek for God with all of our hearts? If we are, His promise is sure, and we will find Him. We can turn that around and recognize that until we seek for Him with all our hearts, we will not find Him. We will discover what is first in our hearts and lives. When things of this world and things of our everyday life become a priority, we find time for those things. When we recognize our hunger for God and search for Him, we will make time for Him. I suggest that you look at those two words differently. We *find* time and we *make* time. You will never find time for God. The pressures of the world, the pressures and temptations of the enemy, will take your time. We have to choose to make time for God and put Him first. Let's recognize the fact that discipleship is our journey to know and walk with God.

Let's learn from facing our needs. First of all, life confronts us with our helplessness, with our hopelessness, and with our aloneness. **(Note: Use a current illustration that portrays our helplessness.)**

I've asked myself over and over again, when it comes down to it, where do I find comfort? Where do I find strength? And I realize that without God, I am helpless, I am hopeless, I am alone. But with Him I have everything I need. With God, all my needs are supplied. Many of us have the extras of life. Most of us do not deal with basic needs. We deal with the extras of life. I want to challenge you to deal with the basic issue of facing your need for God. We hunger for God by experience and by creation.

Let's learn from Moses. There is an incredible story that starts in chapter twenty-four of the book of Exodus. We are not going to look at all of those chapters, but I want to point you back to chapters twenty-four and twenty-five, where Moses comes before God on Mount Sinai and God speaks to him.

First you have the experience of Moses being on top of Mount Sinai. He receives the Ten Commandments, receives instructions for building the sanctuary and comes out of the clouds where he was meeting with God. Then Moses meets Joshua and they begin to walk down the mountainside. As they come close, they hear a loud noise coming up from the camp. Joshua says, "It sounds like a noise of battle." Moses says, "No, that is not the noise of battle, that is the noise of feasting. They are having a party." And when they come within sight, Moses sees that the party is around a golden calf. Moses has made the journey from the top of the mountain, in the presence of God, to the presence of the people enraptured with a golden idol. In his anger and frustration, he throws down the tables of stone and they are fragmented and shattered, symbolizing what the children of Israel have done to their relationship with God. They have shattered and fragmented their walk with God.

Then Moses does something interesting. He goes to God. God speaks to him something that I have never really seen before in this passage. I want you to notice what God says to Moses in Exodus 33:1-6:

Leave this place. You and the people you brought up out of Egypt. Go up to the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob saying, "I will give it to your descendants. I will send an angel before you and drive out the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and Jebusites. Go up to the land flowing with milk and honey."

Go ahead, go on up to the Promised Land. I am going to send an angel before you and drive out the enemy. Sounds like good news doesn't it?

But wait a moment! Listen to the next phrase, "But I will not go with you, because you are a stiff-necked people and I might destroy you on the way." Moses, take the people, go on your own.

Notice what Moses says.

When the people heard these distressing words they began to mourn and no one put on any ornaments, for the Lord had said to Moses, "Tell the Israelites you are a stiff-necked people. If I were to go out with you, even for a moment, I might destroy you. Now, take off your

ornaments and I will decide what to do with you.” So the Israelites strip off their ornaments at Mount Horeb.

Why does God say “strip off your ornaments?” God is challenging them with the fact that their focus needs to be on Him. Not on themselves, their possessions, their properties, their wealth, or their appearance, but on God alone.

Then Moses goes into a tent which has been pitched at the edge of the camp. Probably between the camp and Mount Sinai. It was called the Tent of Meetings. He goes in and speaks to God face to face. He pleads with God. Notice Moses’ conversation with God in verses 12-17:

Moses said to the Lord, “You have been telling me to lead these people, but you have not let me know who you will send with me. You have said, ‘I know you by name and you have found favor with me.’ If you are pleased with me, teach me your ways that I may know you and continue to find favor with you. Remember that this nation is your people.” The Lord replied, “My presence will go with you and I will give you rest.” Then Moses said to Him, “If your presence does not go with us, do not send us up from here. How will anyone know that you are pleased with me and with your people unless you go with us? What else will distinguish me and your people from all the other people on the face of the earth?” And the Lord said to Moses, “I will do the very thing you have asked because I am pleased with you and I know you by name.”

Moses intercedes between God and the people. He says, “Please go with us.”

Because of Moses’ faithfulness, God says, “I will go with the people.”

Then comes the most powerful verse of the entire story. In verse 18, Moses says, “Now, show me your glory.” Moses wants to see God in His glory.

That thought has gone through my head over and over again for a long time. What would it mean to see God in His glory? God turns to Moses, stating, “Upon the mountain there is a cleft in the rock where I want you to stand. I will put my hand over you. I will make my glory pass before you.” There, in the Tent of Meeting, God gives him part of the answer.

“And the Lord said, ‘I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you and I will proclaim my name, the Lord’” (v. 19). (Attention is called to the way the word **LORD** is written in the Bible—all in capital letters. This is a signal that the biblical translators have put in for us to help us understand who this Person really is. In the Hebrew mind, the most sacred name for God was a name that was never pronounced aloud. Never! In fact, when the scribes were writing it as they copied their manuscripts, they would cut a new quill to write the name of God. They would put the consonants for God’s name and the vowel points for the word Lord, which was Adonai. When they came to this in the Scripture, they would always just say LORD. But what is the name? It is the name of a covenant keeping God. It is a promise that God says, “By this name you will know that I keep my covenant.”

What is important about this? God says, “I will let my character pass before you. You will know me by who I really am, with my presence.” He continues, “I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion, but you cannot see my face. No one can see me and live.”

So, Moses goes up on the mountain with the tables of stone and he spends another forty days with God. Starting in Genesis 34:5 it says:

Then the Lord came down in the cloud and stood there with him and proclaimed his name, the Lord. And he passed in front of Moses, proclaiming, “The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, maintaining love to thousands, and forgiving wickedness, rebellion and sin. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children and their children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation.”

What is Moses’ response as God reveals His character to him? Moses bows down and worships Him.

Now the rest of the story. After forty days in the presence of God and after seeing the beauty of God’s character, after beholding God, Moses comes down from the mountain and he walks into the presence of the children of Israel. Do you remember what they said?

“Cover your face. Put a veil on your face. We cannot stand the brightness of the glory that is reflected on your face.” Because of the reflected glory of God, Moses has to cover his face to protect the people. When is the last time anybody has asked you to cover your face because they see too much of God in you? What would happen if you and I experienced the glory of God’s presence which so completely transformed our lives that our daily contacts on the job, in the home, in the classroom, or wherever we are, would be confronted with the person of God?

This is what God wants to do for us. He wants us to have such a vibrant, dynamic relationship with Him that our very lives reflect His presence. Think of the impact. What would happen if we went into the drugstore, or the gas station, or some other store and people said of us, “There goes someone who has been with God.” I cannot think of any greater tribute that could be given to our God than for others to see Him reflected in us. Can you?

I ask myself, “How in the world can that be real?” Then, I recognize that God has some very specific and very real promises. Turn to Jeremiah 29:11-13. Here we find the prophet speaking the words of God in verse eleven, saying something very exciting to us.

“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “Plans to prosper you and not to harm you. Plans, to give you hope, and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek for me with all your heart.”

Verse fourteen begins, “I will be found by you, if you seek for me, with all your heart you will find me.” I’ve thought about that. What does it mean to seek for God with all our hearts?

Look at this other promise in Jeremiah 31:3. Here is something else that God has said: “I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have drawn you with loving kindness.”

Let me ask another question. When was the last time you and I truly experienced God’s overwhelming love—that we knew this passage to be true in our hearts? “I have loved you with an everlasting love. I have drawn you with loving kindness.” When was the last time we took some quiet time with God and heard Him say to us through His Word or through His

Spirit speaking to our hearts, “You are my beloved? You are the apple of my eye. If somebody touches you, they are touching the apple of my eye. I have loved you with an everlasting love. With loving kindness, I have drawn you. You are the person I love above all others.”

Finally, the promise in Isaiah 41:10: “So, do not fear for I am with you. Do not be dismayed for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you. I will uphold you with my righteous hand.” Then the promise in Matthew 28:20 that we looked at before in the Gospel Commission where Jesus said, “And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

Is God with us in such a way that we can make a difference in the lives of others wherever we live? (**Note:** Use an illustration showing how God can work through us to touch someone around us, or you can use the following illustration from hurricane Katrina.)

When hurricane Katrina struck Mississippi and Alabama, Bass Memorial Academy in Lumberton, Mississippi, experienced damage to a number of buildings. Still, it became a center for feeding a large number of people and a distribution center for the area. After several days, the food supply was nearly exhausted. Suddenly, God showed up in the midst of a tragic situation. On Friday night, the coordinator of the feeding center called a group together and said, “We need a special time of prayer. We have run out of food. We do not have enough to feed everybody who will be coming for the next few days. We need to pray that God will send us food so that we can provide food for the five to ten thousand who will be coming for two meals a day.” Almost before their prayer was over, there was a rumble of a huge semi truck coming on campus; its bright lights shining into the room.

They went out and discovered a truck which had left Virginia that morning, loaded with thousands of pounds of food—not knowing where they were going or what they were going to do with it. They stopped at every town where there was apparent need, trying to give the food away. Each place said, “We cannot take the supplies. We do not have a way of dealing with this.” Finally, they got into the Lumberton, Mississippi area and, by word of mouth, heard there was a distribution center out at Bass Memorial Academy that might take the food supplies. These thousands of pounds came in that semi truck Friday night. Before Sabbath was over the next day, eleven semi trucks had come and unloaded food to continue feeding the thousands. In the middle of a crisis, God appeared.

You and I are in a greater crisis than a hurricane. We are in a struggle for our lives and God is trying to show up in our lives, in a greater way than simply through thousands of pounds of food. He wants to be involved in every detail of our lives. He says, “I am with you. I will go with you. I have plans for you that you cannot imagine.” I, for one, am tired of living the Christian life with only an occasional glimpse of God. I want to see God's glory, don't you? I want to see God's presence in my life daily. I want to see Him in the lives of our congregations in such a way that we do not continue “doing church” as usual. That we are transformed with the reality of God's presence! I am determined to seek for Him as never before. With all my heart! With all my soul! With all my strength! For I want to see God's glory. I want to know His character and I invite you into that journey. It really comes down to, trying God—to seeking God. That promise first appears in Deuteronomy 4:29. I'll let you read that on your own. But, seek for Him in every detail of your life.

Cody is young man from South Carolina. While he was serving as a Marine in Iraq he was

driving a humvee on patrol. There were four humvees in a row. He was driving the fourth one. They came across a place by the side of the road where there were some stacks of hay that looked a little suspicious. They hesitated, and then they went on through. Suddenly, one of the stacks exploded twice. The shrapnel hit their vehicle but no one was injured. One of the soldiers in the company with him had a ruptured ear drum, which caused serious bleeding from one ear, but that was the extent of their injuries. As soon as things settled down, Cody said, quietly to himself, "I sure am glad I prayed before I left the barracks tonight." The Marine beside him said, "You pray?" Cody, said, "You bet I pray. I don't leave the barracks until I pray." From that day on, the rest of the team would ask him if he had prayed before they went out on patrol

Whether it is on the battlefield of Iraq, or facing a hurricane or the challenge of the enemy in our daily life, we do not have the option of doing it on our own. We must seek God, make Him first and focus on Jesus. John 12:32 says, "And if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me." It is as we focus on knowing Jesus that we open our lives to God.

Colossians 3:1-3 challenges us to fix our eyes on things above, on Jesus. If we want our church transformed, if we want our lives transformed, it really comes down to trying God. That is why we are dedicating these next seven weeks to a new strategy called, *Steps to Discipleship*. Many of you have already received the material for the first week. There is a Study Guide for those of you who have small groups or want to be part of a small group. You can get the Study Guide from the group leader to help you. But what we are asking you is, along with the weekly sermon, (the next eight sermons) beginning with this sermon, there will be seven weeks of study that you can do on your own, or with your spouse, at home. It is simply a Study Guide into God's Scripture, studying more on the subject that will be presented each Sabbath.

If you are part of a small group, we invite you to make that the focus of your discussion. The question is, are we willing to spend daily time with God. I challenge you! Give God thirty to forty-five minutes a day for seven weeks and see if He won't make a difference in your life. Test Him. Prove His Word. He has said, "If you seek for me with all of your heart, you will find me." I believe we can put Him to that test, as a corporate group and as individuals. I want to invite you, if you have not been giving God any time regularly, give Him thirty to forty-five minutes a day. If you have a regular devotional life, let me encourage you to adapt this material into that life and focus on the sequence of seven major decisions that we will begin with next Sabbath.

Today's decision is to try God and make this commitment. Next Sabbath we will face our first decision of the sequence which takes us deeper into a relationship with God. Let me tell you right up front, it focuses on accepting and affirming our salvation in Jesus Christ by Grace alone. Accepting the gift of salvation—that is what we will cover next Sabbath, but today I want to challenge you. I want to invite you to commit yourself to a half hour or forty-five minutes a day in the study of God's word. We are not asking you to come to church seven nights a week but to do something in your private study at home. Make daily decisions to give God greater room in your life. Everyday let's invite God to take over and accept the fulfillment of His promise.

Whether it is Cody on the battlefield, or Bass Memorial Academy as a distribution center in the

middle of a Katrina catastrophe, God is our only answer. For us today, we are in the middle of the greatest crises of our lives. If you do not believe that right now, you are in the greatest crisis of your life. What are you going to do with God? Are you willing to take your life deeper. I do not believe there is anyone here who is satisfied and says, "I have all of God I want." I think all of us want something more. We hunger for a deeper, more intimate relationship with God.

I want to invite us as a congregation to commit ourselves to three practical decisions.

1. Choose to seek God first in every detail of our lives.
2. Commit ourselves to daily time with God.
3. Claim the reality of God's presence with us.

It really boils down to testing God to see if He will fulfill His promise to be with us. I have no question that He will. What is important is that we experience it.

▷ PURPOSE

The purpose of this second sermon is to focus on the assurance of salvation which can be ours now, and to highlight that the decision of accepting Christ as Savior is the foundation and starting point for the discipleship journey. The invitation is to accept Jesus as Savior and experience eternal life.

▷ KEY PASSAGES

The key Biblical passages for this sermon are:

- Romans 3:21-24
- John 3:1-21
- John 3:3, 5
- Isaiah 64:6
- John 3:5-8
- John 3:14-15
- 1 John 1:9
- John 5:24
- Romans 6:19-23
- Ephesians 2:4-9
- 1 John 1:9
- 1 John 5:11-13
- Romans 8:1-3, 31-39

▷ KEY POINTS

The key points to include in this sermon are:

- We have a real need for forgiveness and salvation.
- God offers the solution of salvation—forgiveness and new birth—as a gift.
- Our part is to recognize our need and accept the gift.
- When we do accept that gift, we have eternal life now.
- We must choose to accept this gift.

THEME

We are sinners needing salvation, and our only hope is in Jesus Christ. As we recognize and confess our sin, we find forgiveness. Believing in God's promise we have eternal life. The experience of salvation begins the discipleship experience.

THE “NEED” IS REAL (ROMANS 3:21-24)

- For here and now:
 - The pagan.
 - The good person.
 - The religious person.
- For eternity:
 - Created for eternity.
 - Interrupted by sin.
 - Limited in this life.
- We need a Savior!

GOD HAS A “SOLUTION”—NEW BIRTH — BY THE SPIRIT (JOHN 3:1-21)

- It's necessary:
 - Without it we cannot see the kingdom. (John 3:3, 5)
 - We can't help ourselves. (Isaiah 64:6)
- It's miraculous: (John 3:5-8)
 - It cannot be explained.
 - It can only be experienced.

- It's complete:
 - Forgiveness—based on the cross .(John 3:14-15)
 - Cleansing. (1 John 1:9)
 - Eternal life—quality & quantity. (John 5:24; Romans 6:19-23)
- It's a gift. (Ephesians 2:4-9)

OUR “*PART*”

- Recognize our need—confess. (1 John 1:9)
- Believe God's solution—accept. (1 John 5:11-13)
- Trust God's new reality—claim. (Romans 8:1-3, 31-39)

DECISIONS TO MAKE IT “*REAL*”

- Confess our sin and accept forgiveness.
- Accept Jesus as Savior.
- Accept and believe that eternal life is ours.

INSTRUCTION REGARDING STUDY

Some of you may feel a little frustrated because your time runs out before you finish studying all of the passages. That is okay. What we are asking you to do is make a commitment of thirty to forty-five minutes a day studying God's Word—going deeper into what God has for you. The goal is not to finish all of the material. You can always come back later and restudy it again. The goal is to spend time with God, to spend time in His Word, and to reflect on His will and see how He wants to work in our lives. So, just relax, if you are not getting to all the passages everyday and you are not doing all of the study questions. The purpose is to see God.

In that process, what is very important is that we open ourselves to God. The power is not in us. The power that will change our lives is not because we are spending a half hour with God, but because we are opening ourselves up to let God impact our lives. Remember, the power is always in God and His Word.

At the close of the service today, I am going to make a very specific appeal. I want to let you know ahead of time for two reasons. Those of you who are involved in intercessory prayer ministry, I would like to invite your prayers in a special measure during this service. There are people in this congregation this morning who will be confronted by the Holy Spirit to make a decision for Jesus Christ. I would like for those of you involved in prayer ministry and anybody who would like to be, to pray throughout this service that the Holy Spirit will be able to reach those specific people in a very specific way. At the conclusion of the service, I am going to make an appeal. I am not going to ask you to come forward in front of everybody. I am going to ask you to accept Jesus Christ as Savior. If you have never enjoyed the assurance of salvation in Christ, I want you to listen very closely to this service and let God touch your heart. And if He convicts you that this is for you, at the close of the service I am going to invite you to make a decision to accept Jesus as your personal Savior and to rejoice in the assurance of salvation. I am telling you ahead of time what the specific decision is.

Also, at the conclusion of the service, the pastors will not be at the door greeting people as you go out. We are asking you to quietly slip out, do your fellowshiping in the foyer, or outside, and for those of you who are requesting special prayer, or even anointing, we are going to ask you to simply come forward to the front, right-hand side of the sanctuary. We have asked elders, pastors, and prayer teams to be ready to come forward and pray with you, specifically about your special prayer need if you are making a decision to accept Jesus or reaccept Him if you have lost that relationship with Him. At that point, we would invite you to come forward and let whoever is going to be praying with you know that you have made that kind of decision.

I cannot remember a time when preparing for a sermon and working with the study guide materials has had a deeper impact on my life than this week. I wrestled with God's Word as I spent time exploring this subject. I have a settled peace, deeper than anything else I have experienced before. There is no question in my mind of God's ability to save, and of His ability to make a difference in our lives. I want us to explore today, the fact that you can have it now. Salvation and the assurance of salvation is not something that we have to long for and wait

for it to come to us some day, sometime in the future. It is available to us now.

Most of us are aware that we are sinners, needing salvation. There is no question about that and our only hope is in Jesus Christ. As we recognize and confess our sins, we do find forgiveness. It really is that simple. Believing in God's promises, we have eternal life! The experience of salvation begins the discipleship experience. When we experience salvation and assurance in Christ, the discipleship journey begins. Let me turn that around. Without the experience of salvation, every thing else we do in life will be done for the wrong reason.

(Note: At this point have someone from your church membership come forward and share their testimony of how the assurance of salvation has changed their lives. Make arrangements ahead of time for this individual. Choose someone whose experience of salvation is fresh and new.)*

If God can do it for _____, can He do it for you. You may experience a spiritual struggle. The devil is there to tell us "You are not good enough!" I want to ask you a question. How many of you are good enough to be saved today? **(Pause for a moment. You will probably notice only a few hands, if any.)**

And the rest of you? You did not understand my question. I did not ask, "How many of you are good enough to save yourselves?" How many of you are good enough to be saved by the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ? You see, it always comes back to that point. Never anything else! It is always dependent upon what Jesus Christ has done for us. Our need is very, very real. We do need salvation.

Open your Bibles to Romans 3:21-24. Here the Apostle Paul presents a very real truth as to where we find ourselves as human beings, facing the reality of our lives.

"But now, a righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and are justified freely, by His grace through redemption that came by Jesus Christ."

Did you notice that? There is no difference. All of us need salvation. Every one of us have sinned. I do not care if you are pure pagan. The pagan needs salvation. The pagan is the one who has no claim to Christ, who does not pretend but who simply lives life from day to day focused on his needs, his priorities, and his wants.

Sounds like some Christians I know. There is no question the pagan needs salvation, but what about the good person? Right after Hurricane Katrina, Larry King was interviewing Joel Osteen, the pastor of a large church in Houston, Texas, and the Dalai Lama. I was fascinated to listen to the answers. Now, I do not think anybody would question the fact that the Dalai Lama is a good person. He does a lot of good things for a lot of people. But when he talked about what was happening with Katrina, the best answer he could give was, "It is their karma. They are reaping the results of their lives. It is simply their karma."

Larry King kept asking questions that made it clear that he did not understand the Buddhist philosophy. As I listened I thought to myself, Christianity has something to offer that goes beyond the goodness of an individual. It really makes no difference how good a person the Dalai Lama is. The fact is, he needs a Savior just as much as any pagan that never claims to have any search for God.

The religious person also needs a Savior. In fact, the religious person may be in greater danger than the good person or the pagan. For the religious person may be blind to his or her need of a Savior. That is typified in the story of Nicodemus, who came to Jesus by night.

We see it constantly. I know people who are good, religious people, good Seventh-day Adventists and their lifestyles are careful. They practice all the beliefs and believe all the doctrines of the Adventist Church, but still do not have the assurance of salvation. There are probably some of those in this congregation today. I know people who are very careful and meticulous in how they keep the Sabbath—what they do, and will not do on the Sabbath, what they eat, and will not eat. They are very careful in following all the guidelines they have heard and are looking for another guideline, because if somehow they could find the right guidelines they could do it. But, they do not have any peace or joy. In fact, this kind of person is blind to her/his deep need and has a greater need for God than the pagan or the good person who is seeking for something better. There is no one as blind as the one who is satisfied with where he or she is in life.

Is it just for the here and now, that His strength and salvation is needed? What about for eternity? If this life is all there is, it is a pretty miserable life. We have a lot of blessings. There are a lot of good things that we experience, but let's face reality. When a loved one faces death while struggling with cancer, when there seems to be no answer, when medical science has done all it can and doctors and nurses turn to palliative care, we feel helpless. Many of you know what I am talking about. I went through this with my mother just a few years ago. If this is all there is to life, we understand the words of Paul when he says, "If there is no resurrection, we of all men are most miserable." If this life is all there is, then God help us. It simply is not worth playing the Christian game.

There are people who say, "If I live a good Christian life and there is nothing more than this life, it was still worth it." Well, Paul disagrees with this logic. Paul says, "If there is nothing beyond the now, we of all men are most miserable." "If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men." (1 Corinthians 15:19, NIV) Why? Imagine putting your whole life, all of your confidence, all your trust in something that is only a fable, if at the end of life you discover it was useless. It would be pretty miserable. I am here to tell you there is ample evidence that this life is not all. It begins with Jesus Christ, and when this life is done, life will only have begun, because you go to sleep and your next conscious thought is the beginning of eternity!

Ten thousand years from now, what will you say? Somehow, I have this impression that ten thousand years from now, when we gather together in the New Earth, we are going to be praising our God who has created a totally different life for us. You and I were created for eternity. Not for a mere sixty, seventy, eighty or even a hundred years. We were not created for the here and now. We were created for something different. This creation was interrupted by sin, and what we are living here in the seventy, eighty, or a hundred years we have on this

earth, is only a sinful interruption in God's eternal plan. Are we going to live for the short sinful interruption, or are we going to live for the purpose for which God created us—eternity with Jesus Christ. It really boils down to this simple question, because this life is limited.

Let's think of it from another perspective. Think of any area of your life where you feel handicapped or oppressed, where you are struggling with pain or sorrow or sickness. Where suffering is very real and it seems that things are not going the way you would like for them to go. I want to ask you a simple question. A thousand years from now, what difference will it make? When we are in the millennium in heaven, we are going to look back and will not even be able to remember our sins. We will remember we were sinful, but not the details. Sin will be no more. See the difference that it makes?

Let's not just focus on the eternal. Let's come back to the here and now. We need a Savior, today. I don't know what I would do if I had to live one more day without the knowledge of Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. Facing each day with the confidence that Jesus Christ died for me, has saved me, that I have been given a secure and eternal future, has changed my values and priorities and the very way that I look at life.

Now, I will admit that I still really struggle with sin. Recently, I had a really big struggle. **(Note: I used an illustration from my own journey. This is a good time to share an illustration from your own struggle with sin.)** My computer crashed and I sent it to the Toshiba warehouse to be repaired. It came back and I started loading on software only to discover that the keyboard didn't work properly. I was in Microsoft Word trying to type something. Every time I hit the space bar it gave me a space and a hyphen. Every time I hit the hyphen, it gave me a space and a hyphen. Every time I hit a "T" it brought up the whole Spell Checker. Now that was frustrating enough.

Then I called Toshiba and explained the situation. They said, "Well, there is nothing we can do about it. We will have to send you out another box. It will go out on Monday and you should get it on Tuesday or Wednesday. Then you should send the computer back."

I asked, "Is there anyway you can expedite that?" The reply was, "No, you have a regular warranty, so this is the way it works." I said, "Help me understand this. This is not my problem. This is your problem. You created it. When it went out to you there was no problem with the keyboard. You changed the mother board. You changed the hard drive and you changed the keyboard, somehow."

They replied, "We are sorry, you have a standard warranty service, and this is what we have to do."

I asked if I could speak to a supervisor. In the meantime, I suddenly realized there were some very un-Christ like emotions stirring within my soul, and to keep from using some very un-Christ like language with the Toshiba technical support person, I finally said, "Look, Mam. Please understand that I am not angry with you, but I am angry because of the service which has not been provided. You are driving me to Dell. You need to understand that I have used Toshiba computers for twelve to fourteen years, but I am thinking seriously about going to Dell computers."

She responded, "Well, we are sorry; we understand your frustration."

I replied, “No, you don’t understand my frustration.”

I was wrestling with all of these unchristian feelings and emotions when suddenly it hit me. When my computer crashed, I did not have any of these struggles. But all of a sudden, a brand new struggle was out there, and I was having to face the reality that the old sinful man is still here. Once again, I needed to die with Jesus Christ. I needed the assurance that in spite of my sinful heart, Jesus Christ loves me and wants to forgive me and give me eternal life. That is the fact I struggled with. I did not say unkind things to them, but I surely thought them.

Remember what Jesus said, “If you thought them, you might as well have done them.” Because, if you think them in your heart, that is where it is. That principle is very clear in Christ’s teaching. So, I had to come face to face with my own sinfulness, and I am so glad I did not have to do it only with my sinfulness. That I could do it in the context of God’s forgiving grace. We need a Savior! I need a Savior every single day of my life! Does that make sense?

Do you know what? God has a solution. It is called the “new birth,” and it comes through the Holy Spirit. Look at what Jesus said to Nicodemus in John 3. This chapter is a favorite for most Christians. In fact, it contains verse sixteen, which is the best known verse in all of Christianity. You ask anybody to quote a verse and almost everybody can quote John 3:16. You are watching a football game and there is some guy holding a sign which reads, John 3:16. “For God, so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” Have we really thought about what Jesus is saying in John 3? Is it such a common story that we have lost the significance of what Jesus offers to us this morning?

Let’s go to John 3 and note how it begins. “Now, there was a man of the Pharisees named Nicodemus.” Here, you have to understand the Pharisees. Pharisees were the Seventh-day Adventists of their day. So don’t be too hard on the Pharisees. Because when you get up and look into the mirror, you are looking at one. The desire of the Pharisee was to perfectly obey the Law of God. There is nothing wrong with that desire. The problem comes when the focus on obedience replaces the reliance on a Savior. In fact, I hope every one of us has a desire to obey God and to experience the joy of victorious living over sin. But, we cannot do it on our own. It can only be a by-product of our relationship with God. When it becomes the focus of our lives there are problems.

Nicodemus was a member of the Sanhedrin, so he was considered one of the top spiritual leaders of the entire people of Israel. Notice, it says here, “A member of the Jewish ruling counsel, he came to Jesus at night.” That tells you something by itself. He sneaks to see Jesus, where his reputation won’t be questioned. He does not want the rest of the Sanhedrin to know that he is going to listen to this Rabbi. He does not want the other religious leaders to recognize that he has been to see Jesus. After all, he has his religious reputation to keep up, so he comes to Jesus by night and he says, “Rabbi, we know you are a teacher who has come from God, for no one can perform the miraculous signs you are doing if God were not with him.” You are a good man. You do wonderful things. You come from God. You do miracles. I am sorry. That just does not cut it! If all Jesus is for you is a good man who came from God, who does miracles, it is simply not enough.

In reply, Jesus declared, "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again."

"How can a man be born when he is old?" Nicodemus asked. "Surely, he cannot enter a second time into his mother's womb to be born." There is no question. It is a one way trip. He is asking a facetious question: "What are you talking about?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless he is born of water and the Spirit."

Now, let's look at two key points about this conversation between Jesus and Nicodemus.

1. New birth is necessary. Without it, there is no future. You cannot enter the kingdom of heaven without it (Isaiah 64:3, 5).

We cannot help ourselves (Isaiah 64:6). Isaiah presents a harsh reality for God's people.

"All of us have become like one who is unclean and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags. We all shrivel up like a leaf and like the wind our sins sweep us away."

Have you ever felt that way? We all sin, and our best work on the best of our days, our good work when we help the Katrina survivors, that righteous act, is still a filthy rag. Why? It comes from a polluted heart, a sinful nature. That work contributes nothing to our salvation. Should we help Katrina victims? Of course! Because we are experiencing God's blessings, because we know God's heart, because we are an extension of God's hands, we help people in need around us. Out of our walk with God, we help people. Yet this does not change the fact that salvation and a new birth are still a necessary reality.

2. This new birth is also a miraculous reality. It is not something natural. It is not something you and I can create. Let's go back to John 3:5 and begin reading where we finished. Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless He is born of water and the spirit. Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to Spirit. You should not be surprised at my saying you must be born again. The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So, it is with everyone born of the Spirit."

It is real. It is miraculous, and you cannot explain it. You can only experience it. I know you can watch the Weather Channel and it can explain why the wind is coming where it comes from, but do you really understand it? They describe what is happening. They try to explain it, but we don't fully understand what is happening. Yet we can still experience the weather without fully understanding it. It is the same way, with the Holy Spirit. Just like the wind, you can see its effects. You can experience it, but you cannot explain the new birth. It is miraculous, and it is real. When it comes, it changes your life doesn't it? You see, that is what it is all about. Not only is it miraculous. It is complete. It is not a partial job. Notice what John 3:14-15 says as Jesus continues talking to Nicodemus: "Just as Moses lifted up the snake in the desert, so the Son of Man must be lifted up, that everyone who believes in Him may have eternal life."

There is forgiveness, there is salvation, there is eternal life, and it is based upon the cross. Jesus said, "The Son of Man must be lifted up." It is not based on what we do. It is based on what God does. Secondly, it includes cleansing. First John 1:9 says, "If we confess our

sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” I shared some of my personal struggle with sin. You know I need an internal clean-up job. As I spoke, I wanted to ask forgiveness for the thoughts I had then. I know God is at work doing the clean-up job that I need. That is part of character development, as we grow together. The fact is, that part of the gift is not only forgiveness. It is cleansing from all unrighteousness. That gives me hope. That gives me courage. That gives me joy.

Finally, these promises include eternal life—as quality and quantity. I want to move forward to John 5:24, where it says when we accept Christ, when we believe in Him, we have passed from death to life. I suggest that this is talking about both the quality and quantity of eternal life. Paul talks about the same thing in Romans 6:19-23. Verse 23 states: “The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.”

I am so glad that when we deal with this subject it is a gift of God, not something based on our performance. For those who are studying *Steps to Discipleship* this week, you will go deeper into this concept with Ephesians 2:4-9 where it says, “Because of His great love for us, God in his mercy has redeemed us, has lifted us up.” Verses eight and nine say, “It is by grace we are saved. It is a gift of God, not by works, lest any man should boast.” The greatest good news I have for us today is our great need. Salvation is a free gift offered to us because of our need. It is a free gift offered to every one of us. It is ours by simply accepting it.

I want you to think about your own experience. How has God been working in your life? What has the Holy Spirit been saying to you? Our part is to recognize our need. Every one of us needs to confess our sin and sinfulness. It is an everyday issue. Even if we are not dealing with what we often consider as gross sins such as adultery or murder, we still have sinful hearts that have the potential to sin and need Jesus every day.

Not only do we need to recognize our need and confess, we need to believe God’s promise and accept it. First John 5:11-13 states very clearly, “He that has the Son of God has life. He that does not have the Son of God does not have life.” Verse thirteen is one of my favorite verses in all of Scripture because of the incredible assurance that is in that one single verse: “These things have I written unto you who believe in the name of the Son of God. That you might know that you have eternal life.” This verse says to us that if you believe that Jesus Christ died for you, eternal life is yours, right now. It really is that simple.

Finally, we need to trust God’s new reality and our new reality in God, and claim the fact that we are new creations in Christ. Romans 8 is one of the most powerful chapters in all of Scripture. Beginning with verse one, “Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.” It does not matter how perverse our thoughts were when we struggle with sin if we have confessed it and asked God’s forgiveness. There is no condemnation.

When we are in Christ Jesus, there is nothing that condemns us as long as we stay in Him. Look at verse two. Why? Because through Christ Jesus, “the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death. For what the Law was powerless to do in that it was weakened by the sinful nature, God did by sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful man to be a sin offering.” I am here to tell you that Jesus Christ has done everything necessary to save us. Go to the end of the chapter. I want you to look at verse 31 through verse 39.

“What then, shall we say in response to this? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all. How will he not also along with him graciously give us all things? Who will bring any charge against those whom God has chosen? It is God who justifies. Who is he that condemns? It is Christ, Jesus who died. More than that, who was raised to life and is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ?”

Then go to verse 37:

“In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us. For I am convinced, that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present or the future, nor any powers, neither height nor death, nor anything else in the whole creation will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.”

It is complete, it is beyond question. It is our new reality in Christ. We face three key decisions to make this our reality:

1. Confess our sin and accept the forgiveness.
2. Accept Jesus as Savior.
3. Accept and believe that eternal life ours today.

I told you at the beginning of this sermon that I was going to make an appeal. This is not a heavy, emotional appeal. We do not even have background music for it. It is simply a direct appeal.

If, today the Holy Spirit is speaking to you and you want to accept forgiveness and claim the new life that is yours in Him; if you are making that decision, I invite you to speak to Him in your own mind. Accept Jesus as your personal Savior.

There is one other group to whom I would like to speak. There may be someone here who in the past has experienced the joy of Jesus Christ. You've made a mess of your life and you are struggling with sin and you feel unworthy. I have wonderful news for you. None of us are worthy. Salvation is not based on our worthiness. It is based on God's grace. He gives to you today the same assurance you may have lost, and if you want to, re-accept Jesus as your Savior today. You have experienced it in the past. But you have lost your assurance and today you want to make that decision anew. I invite you to turn back to Christ and tell Him you want to come back.

I want to ask the two groups to do one other thing. In just a moment I am going to have a closing prayer. At the close of this prayer, I want to ask the rest of the congregation to quietly slip out and those who are requesting special prayer or anointing to move forward to the right-hand side of the sanctuary. The elders, prayer team and pastors will meet you there. If you have made a decision to accept Jesus as your Savior, I invite you to come forward for special prayer as well. To either accept Him, or re-accept Him. Let us in prayer reaffirm that decision to walk with Jesus Christ. Let's pray:

▷ PURPOSE

The purpose of this third sermon is to present the concept of the Lordship of Jesus as something that we choose to accept by surrendering ourselves to Him. This begins a life of obedience as a result of Christ living and working within us. The invitation is to accept Jesus as Lord as well as Savior.

▷ KEY PASSAGES

The key Biblical passages for this sermon are:

- Acts 7:54-8:1; 9:1-19
- 1 Corinthians 15:31
- Romans 6
- Genesis 1:1
- John 1:1-11
- John 1: 12
- 1 Peter 1:18-19
- Hebrews 10:10
- Acts 2:36
- Romans 5:1
- John 14:27
- Ephesians 2:14
- Romans 6
- 1 Peter 3:15
- Colossians 2:6

▷ KEY POINTS

The key points to include in this sermon are:

- The challenge of lordship is to surrender.
- Jesus is Creator, Redeemer, Sanctifier, and Lord.
- Accepting Jesus as Lord brings us peace—with God, ourselves, and others.
- We must choose to die to self in order to accept the reality of Jesus as Savior.

SERMON OUTLINE 3 • *Ben Maxson* IT'S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

THEME

Jesus is Lord and surrender is our response to His lordship. This surrender begins a new life of power—a life of obedience. He produces in and through us all He commands us to do. Submission to Jesus as Master is a core element of our discipleship journey with God.

THE “**GREATEST**” CHALLENGE: (ACTS 7:54-8:1; 9:1-19)

- To accept Jesus as Lord:
 - For the non-Christian.
 - For the “Christian.”
- It is a challenge because:
 - We face our need.
 - We have to submit/surrender.
 - We have to die. (1 Corinthians 15:31, Romans 6)
- The Lordship of Jesus Christ:
 - Goes against our culture.
 - Goes against our heritage.
 - Goes against our nature.
- This is why Paul speaks of dying daily.

THE JESUS “**REALITY**”

- He is the Creator. (Genesis 1:1; John 1:1-11)
- He is the Redeemer. (John 1: 12; 1 Peter 1:18-19)
- He is the Sanctifier. (Hebrews 10:10)
- He is Lord! (Acts 2:36)

SERMON OUTLINE 3 • *Ben Maxson* IT'S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

THE “**BENEFITS**” OF ACCEPTING JESUS AS LORD:

- We have peace with God. (Romans 5:1)
- We have peace with ourselves. (John 14:27)
- We have peace with others. (Ephesians 2:14)

LORDSHIP “CHOICES” FOR TODAY:

- Die to self—accept the reality of Jesus as Savior. (Romans 6)
- Choose Jesus as Lord. (1 Peter 3:15)
- Live with Jesus as Lord. (Colossians 2:6)

It really is all about surrender. It is about who is going to be in control of our lives. You see, it is a historical fact that Jesus is Lord and surrender is our response to His lordship. There is no other response. There cannot be two lords. It just does not work. Either God is Lord of all, or He is not Lord at all. It is a very simple equation. God is preeminent. He is in first place and has complete control. We are partners with this incredible God who lifts us up to reign with Him, only as we surrender and die in Him.

Surrender is the road to the discipleship walk with God. This surrender begins a new life of power—a life of obedience He produces in and through us in all He commands us to do.

Now this is a very important point. When we get into the subject of, righteousness by faith and living and walking with God, some people get a little nervous and afraid that we are down-playing the importance of obedience. Let me say two opposite statements:

For many years we have overstated the importance of obedience. Obedience has been made the end in itself and has created all kinds of problems for us as individuals, families, and as a Church.

Now, the opposite statement—for the same years, there has been within contemporary Christianity, a tendency to underplay the importance of obedience.

The Devil does not really care which ditch he catches us in. Whether we focus on obedience, to the exclusion of God, or whether we focus on our own liberty, to the exclusion of His Lordship. Both are problematic and both are present within our Church family. I am not going to point any fingers, because frankly, I find my own journey bouncing back and forth between the two ditches. It is real easy to fall into either ditch.

What I want to explore with you today is the secret of finding the right kind of relationship with God. For when we have the right kind of relationship, everything is changed. Submission to Jesus as Master is a core element of our discipleship journey with God.

If you were to ask me what my passion, what my dream is for this Church family, I could state it clearly in one simple statement. My dream is that each of us will fall so passionately in love with Jesus Christ that we will give Him room to do whatever He wants to do in our lives. That is my dream for us as a congregation and as individual disciples—following Jesus Christ. That He will become so preeminent, so dominant, so all-consuming in our lives that we will give Him room to produce all He wants to in us. It is not an easy road, because in order for this to happen, something has to happen to self.

You see, the greatest challenge facing Christianity today is the challenge of the Lordship of Jesus Christ.

Let's look at this challenge in the book of Acts, in a story that is very familiar, yet is one of the most dramatic stories in all of Scripture. In fact, we have an idiomatic expression when we speak of having a "Damascus road experience." When you hear the phrase, what comes to your mind? Saul's conversion! In Acts 8:1 Saul first appears in a little side statement. It is not even part of the core story. It simply says, "And Saul was there giving approval to his death." That is all it says. But, go back. What is the context?

Stephen, the deacon, has been preaching. He has been sharing the message of Christ and

the Jews are upset with him. They seize him and he preaches a sermon before them and finally declares, “The God that you rejected is Jesus Christ.” Notice verse 54 of Chapter 7. “When they heard this, they were furious and gnashed their teeth at him.”

Have you ever seen somebody gnash their teeth at somebody else? I have never seen it. I have seen some pretty angry people, but I have never seen anybody gnash their teeth at somebody else. That has got to be a very deep level of anger! What would it look like to gnash your teeth? I do not know. It is a phrase that is just in there. But they are angry and then they go on.

Stephen adds insult to the injury. Verse 55 says, “Stephen looked up into heaven and he saw the glory of God and Jesus standing at the right hand of God.” Somehow the curtains of eternity are pulled back, and Stephen is able to look right into the throne room of heaven and he sees Christ there. And he responds, “Look, I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right-hand of God.” At this they covered their ears and yelling at the top of their voices, they rush at him, drag him out of the city and begin to stone him. Meanwhile the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, “Lord, Jesus, receive my spirit!” And he fell on his knees and cried out, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them.”

When Stephen said this, he fell asleep, and Saul was there giving his approval. It seems like Saul was just a hired hand holding the coats. Just standing there! When we go to Chapter 9, we discover the rest of the story. When Saul had finished persecuting all the Christians he could reach in the area of Jerusalem, he went before the Sanhedrin and asked for special license to go to Damascus to get the Christians that had fled there and drag them back to be executed in Jerusalem. Saul was a member of the Sanhedrin and was considered one of the key spiritual leaders of his time—one of the brightest young leaders coming up in the Church. His zeal was unlimited. He was organizing death squads to take care of the Christians.

Now, he has the ultimate license to go head-hunting and he is on his way to Damascus when suddenly a sound like thunder and a bright light like a bolt of lightning strikes him down, and he trembles on the ground. Look at what the story says in Acts 9:4: “He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, ‘Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?’ ‘Who are you Lord?’” I have always been intrigued by that. He has just been struck down by this glorious light which I cannot help but think is the glory of God. He has heard this incredible sound that has deafened everybody else around, and they cannot understand what God is saying. God speaks to him and he responds, “Who are you, Lord?” Why do you call him Lord, if you do not know who He is?

You see, Saul has reached the point that every “Christian,” must reach, where a Christian is confronted with his or her claim to godliness without the presence of God in that relationship. Suddenly, God is there and God confronts him. In his confusion Saul calls out, “Who are you, Lord?” He knows who it is. The confusion is just in his head. Suddenly he is confronted by the fact that everything he has been doing in his zeal to protect the Church, to purify the Church, has been persecuting God. Now that is a pretty heavy point to reach. Think about it. There are some of us who face this point or may need to face it—that in our zeal for what we think is right, we end up persecuting God. Do not forget what Jesus said, “If you have done this unto one of the least of these, my children, you have done it unto me” (Mt 25:40).

When we pass judgment on a fellow believer, when we condemn or come down hard on a young person because they do not do worship quite the way we do, could we be persecuting God? You see, in the Church there is no one more dangerous than the person who is zealous for God and His kingdom without knowing God. That is where Saul was. All of a sudden his entire framework, his entire philosophy—all of his theology comes crumbling down as he listens to Jesus say to him. “I am Jesus whom you are persecuting. Now get up and go from the city and you will be told what to do.”

History is changed in that moment. There would be no Christian Church without the Apostle Paul. It is Paul who gives us the deepest insights into the theology about God. It is Paul who preaches the most about walking with this God. What happened? A good Christian, a godly “person,” has confronted the essence of his sin.

The lordship of Jesus Christ is a great challenge when you are faced with a decision to accept Jesus as Lord. If you are not a Christian, it is an incredible challenge. I have worked with people who have never heard the name Jesus. The idea of trusting in a historical figure that they have never seen as God and surrendering their lives to Him just does not work. And there is no philosophical or theological argument that will convince them, because it is not about philosophy or theology. It is about a miraculous work of grace.

I have watched the Holy Spirit woo and draw a person and they keep coming back, wanting to know more and more about Jesus. Then suddenly, somehow, the miracle takes place, and the Holy Spirit is able to break through, and they surrender and yield. Their lives are turned around. Their lives are transformed.

It is a huge challenge for a non-Christian to accept Jesus as Lord. I want to suggest to you that it is a greater challenge for the “Christian.” Why? Look at the rich young ruler. He is a leader in the synagogue. He is one of the elders of the local congregation, and he comes to Jesus saying, “Good Master, what must I do to be saved?” Jesus says, “Keep the commandments.” “Which ones,” is the reply. Jesus gives him three or four. Do you remember his response? “I have done all of this since I was a child.”

Who of us here, could say that? Who of us today would have the courage to come up front and say, “Ever since I was a child I have kept all of the commandments.” Not one of us. I do not have that courage, because I have not done it.

This is a pretty good man. He has lived a good life. He could stand in front of a crowd say, “I have kept the commandments ever since I was a child.” I am a third or fourth generation God follower. In his case, he could probably go back twelve or fifteen generations. He could trace his way all the way back to Noah. Jesus said, “You lack one thing. Sell what you have. Give to the poor. Come, follow me.”

We have used this story in an effort to raise money, by saying, “You need to sell what you have and give to the poor.” That is not the focal point of the story. You notice, Jesus does not ask for that kind of giving from Nicodemus, who was a very wealthy man. But to this rich young ruler, Jesus goes to the core issue, as he wants to go to your heart and mine today. Christ is saying, “Get rid of anything that stands between you and Me.” The core issue in lordship is, who are you willing to follow? There is only one leader, Jesus Christ. There is no room for any other leaders in this relationship. Until we face the issue of Jesus Christ

being Lord of our lives, everything else we do in Church—be it our service, our ministry, our dedication, our giving, our sacrifice—all of it is worthless. It is offering strange fire to God.

In fact, when it comes to tithes and offerings, Ellen White tells us that God cannot accept the tithe from an unconverted heart. In other words she says that if God does not have the heart, He cannot accept the offering. Why? Because, the only service that has any meaning in our spiritual walk with God is the service that comes from the heart that has accepted Jesus Christ as Lord.

Somehow, in our contemporary Christianity and in today's Seventh-day Adventist philosophy, we have come to the idea that it is possible to accept Jesus as Savior and continue living our lives however we want—continue being our own gods. I hear Christians talking about finding themselves. It is amazing to see the places that journey takes them—outside of Scripture and in violation of God's law. The simple truth is, we will never find ourselves apart from God, for we were created for intimacy with Him. If your search for yourself takes you anywhere but to Jesus Christ, it is a useless search with no future in it. This process is complex in just one thing, it is a decision we face in every aspect of life. Am I willing to let God be Lord? Why is it the greatest challenge? Because we face our need when we face the issue of God's lordship.

(Use an illustration that demonstrates our comfort with the sinful culture around us.)

What is it going to take to confront us with our need? The challenge of Christ's lordship confronts us with our need. We then suddenly realize everything we do, everything we hold important and precious in life has no basis, no meaning apart from Jesus Christ.

The second reason lordship which is such a great challenge is that we have to submit or surrender to Jesus. Frankly, I do not like to submit to anybody. There is something within me that says, "I never give up." ***(Use an illustration from your own life that demonstrates your resistance to surrender.)***

That is the way I have approached most of my spiritual journey. I can do it, if I just try hard enough. Then come those moments when I face the bankruptcy of my soul, and I realize that without Jesus Christ there is nothing. The only way I can have Him is if I surrender and give Him control of my life. There is no salvation apart from lordship. It is not a divided experience. You cannot accept Jesus as Savior and expect to make it to the Kingdom if you reject Him as Lord of your life.

Now, I need to say a little something here. For many years I thought lordship was God's says it—I do it. I tried hard to do whatever God said. I have come to realize that is not lordship, because I can try to do that in my own strength and it does not work. What I have come to realize is, at the core issue of it all, I have to die. That is why in 1 Corinthians 15: 31 Paul says, "I die daily." Romans 6 has an extended comparison where the symbolism of a baptism is given its deepest meaning—that when we are baptized, we are buried into Christ's death and raised into His life. We actually participate in His death. We die in Christ.

This confronts us with the core realization that dying in Christ is not just a simple, spiritual metaphor. It is the most accurate description of the spiritual reality—self has to die, and Christ has to be on the throne of my heart. Frankly, I do not like it. Everything within me

wants to reject that, for I would rather have some other way of being a good man. I have tried most of those ways, but at the end of the day, it is spiritual bankruptcy and it does not cut it. I have had to face the fact that the challenge of Jesus Christ as Lord is the only step for the Christian. To yield, to surrender, to be willing to be crucified with Christ and let Jesus take control is not a one time experience. It is an ongoing journey. It is a daily process. It is a continual growth process.

May I suggest you measure surrender not by what you give up, but by what you do not hold back. For if I hold back anything consciously, I am in rebellion against God. When He says I want into this area of your life, there is only one answer. Yes, Lord, take it. The amazing thing is He does not overwhelm us by telling us all of the areas He needs to address at one time. He does not push us any faster than we can go. Periodically, He taps me on the shoulder and says "Ben, there is another area of your life I need to take over." This is not easy. It strikes at the root of my pride—of who I *think* I am, until I remember that who I am is only found in relationship with Jesus Christ. A whole new life begins to develop.

Jesus' lordship is also a huge challenge because it goes against our culture. Everything in our culture talks about finding yourself. Be your own person! So, the lordship of Christ goes against that. It goes against our heritage. It even goes against our Seventh-day Adventist heritage. I do not think I am the only one who has been tempted to fall into the trap of being proud of my heritage and religiosity—proud of the greatest understanding of the system of biblical truth of any group in the world today. I don't say this with arrogance. It is rather humbling. If I were not convinced of this, I could not stand in front of you. If there was another system of truth out there which I thought was more complete biblically than our Church, I could not stand up here and in honesty and integrity open God's Word to you. I could not continue as a Seventh-day Adventist. I would have to do something else.

When I make this statement, I am confronted by two challenges. One is, what meaning does it have for how I live? And the other challenge is, what about the danger of becoming spiritually arrogant and becoming a contemporary Israelite who looks down on everybody else, saying, "If you only knew!"

I was talking with somebody not too long ago about how God is working in other churches around us, and I am not going to mention those churches. Somebody said, "Well, what about the Sabbath? They are not keeping the Sabbath!" In this attitude our ultimate test of spirituality is, "Is somebody doing what I do?" The ultimate test of biblical spirituality is, "Am I yielded to the lordship of Jesus Christ?"

There is a radical difference between the two, because with the first, I become the determiner of truth. I become the ultimate god of my life. But in the latter, I allow God to be God.

The question that confronts us in every issue of everyday life is, "Who is going to be Lord of my life?" Because, not only does it go against our culture and heritage, it goes against our very nature.

Why? It all goes back to a garden where Lucifer spoke through a serpent and said, "Has God said that if you eat of this tree, if you touch this tree, you will die" (Genesis 3:1-5). Then he said, "It is not true. If you eat of this fruit, look what it has done to me. I am speaking. Think what it will do to you! If you will eat of this tree, you will be like God."

Have you ever stopped to think who Adam and Eve were already like? They were created in the image of God for intimacy with Him. What was Satan offering them? To be gods in themselves! This is the contemporary challenge and problem of every issue of our lives. It is in the philosophy around us. The whole New Age philosophy has swept right into our society. It has swept into contemporary Christianity that you can make your own self a better person. You can be your own god. Behind every temptation is the test to be our own god. Our very nature says, "I want to be in control."

Look at the issues in our own families. How many of you have struggled with the control issue in your home? We all have. Why? Because at the very core of our nature is the desire to be in control, and yielding to Christ's lordship, challenges that desire in me. Let me say it very directly. You will never have the home God wants you to have until Jesus Christ is Lord of both of your lives. You will never be able to raise your children like God wants them raised until you allow Him to be Lord of your life. When that takes place, all the other issues are settled.

This is why Paul speaks of dying daily. In every issue, when self dies then God can work, but until self dies, we stand in the way of God working. So, what is the reality? God is the Creator. Jesus is the Creator. As Lord, He is Creator. As Creator, He is Lord. Genesis 1 says, "In the beginning God made heaven and earth." John 1:1-11 says the Word was made flesh, but before that, it talks about how everything was made through Jesus Christ. He is the Creator. As Creator, He has the right to be Lord of our lives.

Not only is He Creator, He is also Redeemer. John 1:12 says, "As many as believed He gave the power or the right to become children of God."

1 Peter 1:18, 19 describes Jesus Christ being our Redeemer because of His death on the cross. As Creator, He has the right to be Lord. As Redeemer, He has the right to be Lord. And as Sanctifier, He has the right to be Lord. Hebrews 10:10 says, "And by that will we have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ, once for all." That is what "sanctify" means. When we come to the cross, we are made Holy. We are sanctified.

How many of you are holy today?

What about the rest of you?

We need to do an attitude adjustment here. Let me come back with another question?

How many of you have accepted Christ as your personal Savior?

Then biblically, you are holy. You have been sanctified. We have had a totally messed up idea of holiness. We think it is something we are trying to attain. Scripture says it is something that you already are if you are in Christ. You and I have been made holy at the cross.

When you went to the cross you left the old burdens behind, and you left that cross as a new person—a holy person. Yes, we still struggle with temptations. We still struggle with habits of sinful living. We still struggle with a corrupt nature yet within us until glorification at the second coming. But, if we are in Christ, we are holy. We have been made new because He is Creator, Redeemer, and the One who has made us holy.

He has the right to be Lord of our lives. Look at this above all else. Acts 2:36 says, "He made Him to be Lord and Christ." He is Lord. That is the reality, biblically and historically. Jesus is

Lord. The question that comes next is, “Is He Lord of your life today?”

What are the benefits of holiness, of lordship?

1. We have peace with God—Romans 5.
2. We have peace with ourselves. Jesus says, “Peace I give unto you, not as the world giveth.” Why? Because when we come to know Jesus, the pieces of our lives finally fall into place and one of the first things we discover is peace. Because we have peace with God and peace with ourselves, we now can have peace with others around us. Paul counsels us on how to live in peace with those around us. Why? Because it is part of the lordship with Jesus Christ. It is an outgrowth or benefit of it.

So we are faced with some choices for lordship today. Are we willing to die to self—to accept the reality of Jesus Christ, the Savior?

(Use an illustration from your own life that demonstrates a choice to allow Christ to be Lord of your life.)

This is the key question that crystallizes the issue of lordship in our lives. Is it what I want or what God wants that is going to be important to me today? The only way I can solve the issue in my life is to die daily in Jesus Christ. Then comes the decision to choose Jesus as Lord and let Him be in control. 1 Peter 3:15 says, “In your heart, set apart Jesus Christ as Lord.” The word “set apart” is translated in the King James Version, “In your heart, sanctify Jesus as Lord.” The word “to set them apart” is what sanctify means. Let Him be set apart in your heart as the Lord of your life.

Finally, choose to live with Jesus as Lord every day. I love the way Colossians 2:6 says it: “Just as you have received Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, so continue to live in Him, rooted, built up in Him.” It really boils down to a simple issue. In every question of life, am I willing to let him be in control?

I want to ask you, today, “How do you want to live your life? Do you want to live it as many of us have, continuing to struggle to be in control, or do you want to unite your hand with the hand of God and live in divine partnership with Him?” To do it, you have to submit. It really is about surrender. Who will be God in your heart today?

Loving Father,

What an incredible joy it is to serve you, but how desperately difficult it is. Fortunately it is only possible as we die. Lord, we are on a journey together. Last week we rejoiced in your salvation. Teach us to rejoice in your lordship. Help us to have the courage to surrender and let you have control of our lives. But above all else, make Jesus real for us this week. Now, in the strength of the presence of God, in the name of the Son of God, and with His Spirit living within, let us go forth to live His life this week.

In Jesus name, Amen.

▷ PURPOSE

The purpose of this fourth sermon is to develop the concept of the indwelling Christ as the secret to successful Christianity. The invitation is to accept the indwelling presence of Christ in our lives.

▷ KEY PASSAGES

The key Biblical passages for this sermon are:

- Exodus 25:8
- 1 Corinthians 3:16
- 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
- Genesis 1 & 2
 - Genesis 1:26-27
 - Genesis 2:7
- Genesis 3:8-9
- Genesis 3:14-15
- John 1:1-14
- John 14:16-21
- Ephesians 3:14-21
- Philippians 2:12
- Colossians 1:27
- 2 Peter 1:3-4
- Ezekiel 36:26-27
- Philippians 2:13

▷ KEY POINTS

The key points for this sermon are:

- God wants intimacy with us as a church and as individuals.
- God created us for intimacy and sought to restore that intimacy when it was broken by sin.
- God's intimacy with us is established by the reality of Christ dwelling within us.
- Intimacy with God is real for us when we believe it, accept it, and act on it.
- This acceptance of Christ's indwelling presence transforms our lives.
- We must choose to accept Christ as present within us.

THEME

God promises to be with us. More than this, He promises to dwell within us. We are God's ultimate temple. Our spiritual union with God empowers all the rest of our lives. Because He is with us—because He is in us—we too live and have power. The indwelling presence of Christ is the power of discipleship.

GOD'S DESIRE IS “*INTIMACY*” WITH US

- The wilderness sanctuary. (Exodus 25:8)
- The church. (1 Corinthians 3:16)
- Our bodies. (1 Corinthians 6:19-20)

GOD'S “*WAY*” TO INTIMACY

- Created humanity for intimacy: (Genesis 1 & 2)
 - Implied (Genesis 1:26-27)
 - Expressed (Genesis 2:7)
- Sought intimacy when it was broken. (Genesis 3:8-9)
- Promised restoration. (Genesis 3:14-15)
- Provided restoration. (John 1:1-14)
- Applied restoration:
 - John 14:16-21
 - Ephesians 3:14-21

OUR “*RESPONSE*”

- Believe
- Accept
- Act (Philippians 2:12)

“RESULTS” OF INTIMACY:

- The “hope of glory.” (Colossians 1:27)
- Real power. (2 Peter 1:3-4)
- Transformed lives. (Ezekiel 36:26-27; Philippians 2:13)

“DECISION POINTS” FOR TODAY:

- Believe God wants to dwell in us—we are His ultimate temple.
- Claim God’s promised presence with and in us.
- Move forward in faith—live out what He is doing in us.

Last week we dealt with the core issue of beginning the discipleship walk, accepting Jesus Christ as Lord of our lives. This week, we will discuss what it is that empowers the discipleship relationship.

During the last few days, I have been receiving phone calls, notes, and letters that are consistently saying one thing. Spending time with God and His Word each day is beginning to change people's lives. That is exciting! God is doing some amazing things. The power is not in us. It is not about us. It is about God and what He wants to do.

Today's subject is a life-transforming subject for me; for it has changed my entire outlook on God and on life. Let's pray.

Father, as we open our eyes, as we open our minds, as we get into Your Word this morning, I ask that You would be with us, that we really might understand just how much you want to do in our lives. In Jesus' name, Amen.

It is very simple. God promises to be with us. More than this, He promises to dwell within us. This is a radical difference. For many years, I knew God was with me. That is what He was supposed to do. I knew God loved me. That is what I had heard all of my life. I grew up in a Seventh-day Adventist home. I grew up in a preacher's home. I grew up in a church administrator's home. Adventism and Christianity are part of the warp and woof of my every fiber. It is programmed into my DNA. But, it was programmed. That is all it was. I knew God was supposed to love me. I knew I was supposed to love God, but I had no clue what that meant.

Then, I had a little deeper understanding that we are God's ultimate temple. He is not interested in a building. He wants people. He is not interested in dwelling in this place. Yes, we want Him to be here, but we want Him to go beyond that. He wants to dwell in our hearts. Our spiritual union with God empowers all the rest of our lives. Without the presence of God, even the surrender to Him as Lord does not work. You can ask Him to be Lord of your Life. You can surrender everything you have to Him, and still try to live in your own strength, and fail. I know. I can tell you story after story. You see, because He is with us, because He is in us, we too live and have power.

God's ultimate desire is for intimacy with us, because the indwelling presence of Christ is the power of discipleship. He wants this intimacy with us. It is all through Scripture. If you look at Exodus 25, there is a little verse there that describes the beginning of the plans to build the Sanctuary. Moses has been to the mountain. The people have said, "All that the Lord has said, we will do" (Exodus 19:8). God speaks the ten commandments and thunder and lightning appear at the tope of the mountain. The people then turn to Moses and say, "God is too much for us. You go up and talk to Him. We cannot talk to Him face to face," and they asked for a second-hand experience with God.

I wonder how many of us have been satisfied with a second-hand experience with God throughout our lives. It was my father's God. My church's God.

Then, at the end of Chapter 24, Moses is called up to the mountain. God says, "Come up to the mountain. I want to talk to you." Moses takes a group of elders with Him, as well as

Joshua, his assistant. A cloud settles over the mountain. For the children of Israel down in the camp, it looks like a cloud of fire. For Moses, on the mountain, it is just a cloud at that point. He waits for six days. He has talked with God before. Now he has to wait six days before he is invited by God to "Come into the cloud. Come to the top of the mountain. I want to talk with you." Chapter 25 begins with a call to "go back and tell the children of Israel to bring an offering to me." Why? I want you to bring all the precious things you got from the Egyptians when they asked you to leave. Bring an offering. Why? "Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them" (v. 8).

God's ultimate desire is to dwell in the midst of His people. If you read on through Chapters 25-27 and on, you will see the detailed plan for what the sanctuary was to be like, because it is going to be the dwelling place of God, and He wants it to be absolutely the finest place possible in the wilderness journey. They give of their wealth, their finery, and the best they have to worship God. Why? Because God has said, "I want to dwell in your midst."

Intimacy was God's desire. Now, we come down to the Christian Church. In 1 Corinthians 4:16 the Apostle Paul talks about the Church in the context of a church that is divided. The members have been arguing as to who they belong to. One says, "I am of Apollo." The other says, "I am of Paul." Finally, Paul says, "We are God's fellow workers. Don't you know that you are God's temple, and that God's spirit lives in you?" (v. 16). I would hate to try and pastor a church without this understanding. If you get a bunch of people together without God being present, there can be a pretty significant problem. But God says the Church is His dwelling place. It is His temple. I like that!

This church is the temple of God. He dwells here in our midst. He dwells with us. But that is not the ultimate! Look at chapter 6, verse 19. Paul presents an argument. We have used this passage for the health message, saying, "The body is the temple of the Holy Spirit; therefore take care of the body." The principle applies. But that is not the context. The context of this passage is moral living.

To be more specific, it's about living with a prostitute. That is really what it is. Paul uses a very important argument. He says, "Quit doing that!" Why? Not in order to come to God, but because God has already come to you. Don't you know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit?

Now, I want you to catch this concept. If we can understand that God does not only want to be with us, He wants to be "in" us, it will change our lives. He wants a level of intimacy that goes far beyond living with us. He wants to have union with us.

By the way, the story in Genesis tells us God's way for intimacy. We were created for intimacy with God. Genesis one and two describe God's plan, that we might be friends of God. In fact, it is implied in Genesis 1, verses 26 and 27, where God says, "Let us make man in our own image." It goes on to say, "He made man in His own image." It is expressed specifically in the method of our creation. God becomes intimately involved. He takes the clay of the earth and shapes it with His hands, kisses it and it becomes the first human being. We were created in intimacy, for intimacy with God. Our whole purpose is there. And then sin came and shattered that intimacy. But in Genesis 3 we find this God who is seeking to restore that intimacy. Even when it is broken by our sin, He comes looking for relationship with us.

Look at the picture in Genesis 3:8-9. This is after their sin. Verse 7 tells us:

Their eyes were opened and they realized they were naked, so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the Lord God as He was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the Lord God among the trees of the garden."

Why did they hide? Because of their sin! They knew they had rebelled against God. Frankly, our normal reaction when somebody rebels against us is to walk the other way. In Genesis, when they saw God walking in their direction, they hid. But God does not force a confrontation. He calls out to the man: "Where are you?"

It is a call that comes echoing down through the ages of history today, where are we? Where are we in our daily time with God? He seeks to restore intimacy. In fact, He has promised restoration.

In Genesis 3:14-15, God confronts the serpent, the vehicle that Satan used to trick Adam and Eve with the temptation. In verse 14 it says,

The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all the livestock and all the wild animals. You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the women and between your offspring and hers. He will crush your head and you will strike his heel."

There, in the context of the first sin, the gospel appears. God makes a promise. The intimacy distorted and destroyed by sin will be restored in His time, by Jesus Christ. We go on further and, in John 1, find that intimacy restored. How did God do that? He sent His son. "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us." Verse 14, says it all. The word in the Greek is most directly translated—tabernacled—pitched His tent with us. He goes back to the imagery of the Old Testament Exodus journey. The children of Israel are on a pilgrimage from Egypt to Canaan and God says, "Let them build me a Sanctuary that I might dwell among them" and they so built a tabernacle where God could dwell. Now God comes and says, "The Word became flesh." He who was in the beginning was God. He was the one created this world—the Creator God. Hence, God himself came in human flesh, and the union, the intimacy between God and Man was fully restored.

But it does not stop there. We move on, for God wants to go further. We have the implied restoration that is promised in John 14:16-21. Read those verses with me. It is in this text that the Holy Spirit is first promised. Now, this is a passage we have often read. I had been a pastor for many years, longer than I want to admit—almost twenty years, before I began to understand this concept. All of my life, I thought the purpose of the Holy Spirit was to convict me of sin and of righteousness and to teach me how to live. That was the purpose of the Holy Spirit. Isn't that what we have heard?

I want you to notice that when Jesus first gave the promise of the Holy Spirit, He presented an entirely different purpose. In John 14 He says, "And I will ask the Father and he will give you another counselor to be with you, forever, the spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him

because it neither sees him, nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you.”

Where will the Holy Spirit be? In us! Now, He goes on, in verse 18: “I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you.” I have read that for years, and thought, He is talking about the second coming. But that is not the context. Read on! “I will come to you. Before long the world will not see me anymore, but you will see me. Because I live, you also will live.” Notice verse 20. “On that day.” What day? When the Comforter comes. He says, “I will then ask the Father and he will give you another Comforter, another Counselor, the Spirit of truth to be with you forever. . . . On that day, when the Comforter comes, you will realize that I am in my Father, you are in me, and I am in you.”

You see, the primary purpose of the Holy Spirit dwelling within us is to bring the very living presence of Christ into our hearts. He wants recreate a divine union between God and man in us. God's ultimate temple is the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. Through His Spirit, Jesus Christ dwells in us. That is God's ultimate temple.

In Ephesians 3:14-21 the Apostle Paul develops this concept a little further. Paul prays here for the Christians in Ephesus.

“For this reason, I kneel before the Father from whom His whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power, through his Spirit in your inner being.”

I want the Spirit of God to be in you. Notice the next verse, “Why? So that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith.” The Spirit is not some nebulous being that God promised will come and do some nebulous things for us. The ultimate purpose of Paul's prayer for us is that through the Holy Spirit, Christ might dwell in our hearts. How? Through faith.

I want to expand this for just a moment. When I began to understand this, it changed my life. As I embrace and integrate it further into how I live, it continues to change, transform, and make me a different person. Before, I was trying hard to serve God. Now, I am seeking to experience God.

Do you see the difference? At one point my life was dedicated to do whatever necessary to serve God. Whatever He wanted me to do, I was committed to try to do. And I would fail over and over again. Many times, because of my service for God, I missed out on my relationship with God. My preoccupation with doing ministry was first and foremost. I could be so busy serving Him that I did not have time for Him. I began to understand that God does not want to be served. He wants to be loved. God does not want our time, He wants our hearts. He does not want us to sit there and give everything we have to Him, keeping Him at an arm's length. God wants to be intimately involved in every detail of our lives. He wants to dwell in this pitiful, wretched mess, that is Ben Maxson, and He wants to dwell in you.

You see, His dwelling in us is not conditional upon our behavior, but instead our behavior is conditional upon His dwelling in us. If we could just understand that difference! Because when Christ dwells in us, there is no way we can stay the same. It is like the little boy who, during the evangelistic campaign, wanted to respond by coming forward. He kept hearing the invitation, “Let Jesus into your heart.”

Finally, one night, he stops the evangelist outside in the parking lot and said, "Mister, how big was Jesus?"

Thinking the boy wants to know if Jesus was a real, macho man or just a weakling or wimp, the evangelist responds by saying, "Well, Jesus was a big man. He was a carpenter. He was a strong man. He could go out into the woods, cut down a tree, and shape it into lumber. He created furniture, like tables and doors. He was a big man."

The little fellow said, "That's what I thought! And you want me to let Him into my heart? If I'm so little, and He is so big and He comes into my heart, wouldn't He just break out all over?"

There is a simple truth in this, but it is extremely profound that you and I will never change until we let Him into our lives. When we let Him in we cannot help but change. You see, as God's ultimate temple, the applied restoration of our relationship with God does not take place in serving Him, but rather in opening our hearts to the fullness of His presence.

Look at what the Apostle Paul continues to say in this passage. Not only "that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith, and I pray that you being rooted, and established in love 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 surpasses knowledge." Why? "That you may be filled, to the measure of the fullness of God."

If the Holy Spirit is in you, Christ is in you. If Christ is in you, all the fullness of God is in you. How can we stay the same? The power of the discipleship walk is the indwelling Christ.

Look at what that promise includes in the next two verses. Paul cannot help it. He goes into a benediction and a blessing. "Now unto him who is able to do immeasurably more than all that we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the Church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations forever and ever."

I love that first phrase, "Now unto him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine." You cannot dream big enough for God. His dream for us is the fullness of His presence in these fleshly vessels. These vessels made of bone and sinew, muscle and flesh, become the ultimate dwelling place of God. Yes, he dwells in heaven above, but he is not satisfied there. He wants the intimacy of dwelling in you and me.

What is our response to this? We have three simple choices. One is to believe, second, to accept, and third, to act upon that.

Philippians 2:12 talks about obedience. Obedience does play a role in this, but I would like you to notice the context. "Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed, not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence. Continue to work out your own salvation with fear and trembling." God wants us to believe that He wants to be with us. He wants us to accept His presence and He wants us to act on the reality of His presence, to continue a life of obedience. Notice the results of intimacy.

Colossians 1: 27 talks about "Christ in you, the hope of glory." The first thing that comes when there is intimacy with God is that we have the hope of glory. He is talking about the final eternal future with God. That is not the only result. We have real power says 2 Peter 1:3-4: "His divine power has given us everything that we need for life and godliness. How? "Through

our knowledge of Him who has called us by His goodness and grace. Through these—His goodness and grace—“we become partakers of His divine nature and thus escape the corruption of the world, caused by our evil desires.” How does it happen? Through this union of the human with the Divine, we become partakers of God’s very nature. The intimacy is restored to its fullest. God dwells in us and we are transformed into His image and likeness.

Is this a one time event? Of course not. It is an ongoing process. It is a journey where we grow to be more and more like Jesus. In fact, throughout eternity we will continue to grow more and more like Jesus.

Living like Jesus and loving like God. That is what we want. A church family that is so filled with the presence of God that our very lives are transformed. So that we begin to live like Jesus and love like God. Why, because we have the power of God within us. Everything we need for life and godliness is given to us in this relationship with God. Not only that, it leads to a transformed life.

Look at Ezekiel 36: 26-27. There is an incredible promise in this Old Testament prophecy. Some people never see the gospel in the Old Testament, but is all through the Old Testament. The prophet Ezekiel brings to us one of my favorite promises found in the words of God. “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you. I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” Oh, how often we want that transformation. Then he goes on, “and I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my law.” What happens? He changes our hearts with His presence. He puts His Spirit in us which brings the very presence of Jesus Christ. And the result? He causes us to walk in His statutes and obey His law.

What is the producing force? The presence of God—the Holy Spirit—not me! It is not me trying to obey God, but me giving God permission to produce obedience in me. Do you see the difference? All of my life I thought it was my job to try to obey God, and I began to understand that no matter how much I tried, I failed. Then I discovered these incredible promises and this incredible concept that if I will allow Him to dwell in me, He changes my life. He produces obedience.

Yes, I have to make decisions. I have to act on them. Let’s go back to that passage in Philippians 2. We talked about obedience and verse 12, ends by saying: “Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.” We have forgotten verse 13: “For it is God who works within you, both to will and to do according to His good pleasure.” He produces the desire for obedience, and He produces the ability to obey. From beginning to the end, God is the glory of a Christian life. Never us! It really is about God dwelling in us. That brings us to some very key and important decision points for today.

1. Am I willing to believe that God wants to dwell in me? Am I willing to accept the fact that I am, that You are, His ultimate temple?
2. Can I claim God’s promised presence with and in me? Can you?
3. Can I move forward in faith and, believing Him, live out what He is doing in me?

These are the choices of the Christian life. This is the choice of the disciple. It really is an issue of “am I willing to be God’s ultimate temple—to let Him dwell in me and do His will in me.”

That brings us to our closing hymn for this morning. “Live out Thy Life within Me, Oh Jesus King of Kings.” Let’s sing that together as a prayer of dedication, as we ask God to come in and dwell within us to make our bodies, individually and corporately as a church family, His ultimate temple so that we might bring glory to God by how we live in intimate union with the King of Kings.

▷ PURPOSE

The purpose of this fifth sermon is to challenge the new disciple with Christ's invitation to become involved in His ministry of reconciliation—to share Him with others around us. The invitation is to accept our part in the ministry of reconciliation—helping connect others with Jesus.

▷ KEY PASSAGES

The key Biblical passages for this sermon are:

- Acts 10:1-8
- Luke 10:1-3
- Acts 10:9-24
- Acts 10:34-48
- Luke 10:3
- Matthew 4:18-20
- 2 Corinthians 5:14-21
- John 1:35-50; 6:5-13; 12:20-26
- John 1:40-42; 43-46
- 2 Timothy 2:1-2
- Acts 5:40-42

▷ KEY POINTS

The key points which need to be included in this sermon are:

- There is a real hunger for God in the hearts and lives of those around us.
- God does His part in creating that hunger, providing and convicting the workers, and sending His Spirit to work through us.
- Our part is to recognize that we are workers for God, accept our calling to be disciples, and accept our ministry of sharing reconciliation with others.
- We can perform this ministry as we build relationships with those around us, invite them to try God, and sharing the good news of what we have heard.
- We need to choose to accept our role to help reconcile others to Christ.

THEME

We are witnesses to our relationship with God—good or bad. As we experience Jesus Christ, we are called to share Him with those around us. We are part of God’s ministry of reconciliation, and we can do it. Disciples are called to share with others what we experience with God.

THE “*HUNGER*” IS REAL

- Search for God and spirituality.
- Search in non-traditional and non-Christian ways.
- We have moved from a secular drift to a pagan focus on gods of our own making.
- Christianity is plunging into a modern Gnosticism.
- It is time for a return to biblical Christianity.

GOD’S “*PART*”

- He creates the hunger. (Acts 10:1-8)
- He provides the workers. (Luke 10:1-3)
- He convicts the worker. (Acts 10:9-24)
- He sends His Spirit. (Acts 10:34-48)

“*OUR*” PART

- Recognize we are the workers. (Luke 10:3)
- Accept our calling to be disciples—fishers of men. (Matthew 4:18-20)
- Accept our ministry—share reconciliation. (2 Corinthians 5:14-21)

WE “**CAN**” DO IT TOO!

- Building relationships—Andrew. (John 1:35-50; 6:5-13; 12:20-26)
- Just an invitation. (John 1:40-42; 43-46)
- Sharing what we have heard. (2 Timothy 2:1-2)
- Sharing the good news. (Acts 5:40-42)

“**CHOICES**” FOR TODAY’S DISCIPLE

- Maintain our own walk with God.
- Be willing to share.
- Ask God to bring hungry people to us.
- Tell our story.

We are witnesses to our relationship with God. Good or bad. It is just simply that simple. Whatever we have in our walk with God, we give witness too in our relationship with others. If our walk is good, our witness is good. If our walk is struggling, our witness struggles. Our sharing of Christ with those around us is a dynamic part and extension of our discipleship journey. In fact, as we experience Jesus Christ, we are called to share Him with those around us. That is part of our calling and of our identity.

We are part of God's ministry of reconciliation, and we can do it. It is possible for us to be part of God's ministry to the world around us. Disciples are called to share with others what we experience with God.

A while back, a team of six or seven people from our church went to Collegedale, Tennessee, to be trained for "Kids in Discipleship." This program trains parents to disciple their own children. As part of the training, the group came back and told me this story:

As part of the four-day training program, periodically family members would come in and give testimonials as to what this process had done for them and their lives. One of those was a single mother and her ten-year-old daughter. After they had gone through the training for some time, the little girl came downstairs from her bedroom and told her mother that she had a dream. In the dream, God told her that she needed to go to Mexico on a mission trip. Her mother gave her a typical parental response, saying "Sure, maybe we can do that some day," and really did not think much more about it.

A short time later, the mother received a phone call from a friend in another town, inviting her and the little girl to go on a mission trip to Mexico. That made her wake up, and she said, "Maybe I do need to go on this trip!" So she and her daughter went on the trip and had such a fantastic experience that they came back to their home church and single-handedly, this little girl built a "fire" in her own church and convinced the members to send their own group down to Mexico on a mission trip. They ended up with approximately forty people in the group and spent about a week in one village in Mexico.

On the last day, which was Sabbath, they went to what might be called the worst part of town, called "the tracks." Train tracks ran through the town of shacks and shanties, built along the dirt road. One member of the group was a little five-year-old girl named Gabriel who had come with her grandmother. The children were told, "Do not venture out into this area of town without a parent or a grownup with you." As the woman telling the story was watching to see what was going on, she was passing out little shoe boxes full of gifts for the people from the back of the van. She noticed Gabriel and two little Mexican girls with whom she had connected earlier in the week, walking on the road, heading toward "the tracks." The lady called out to the Gabriel's grandmother that she was going away, but the grandmother responded, "The pastor is watching her." Pastor Bough was talking with some youth, and he replied, "Okay, I will take care of it," and started following the little girl and decided to stay back a little, following from a distance, and watch their interactions.

The pastor saw Gabriel walking with her two friends, one on either side, carrying on a conversation. He got close enough to hear them and Gabriel was speaking in fluid Spanish. Later that night, when they went back to the hotel, they would have a period of sharing and prayer. At that time, the pastor asked Gabriel's grandmother, "When did your granddaughter

learn speak such fluid Spanish?” The grandmother replied, “She doesn’t speak Spanish. The only Spanish she knows is what she orders on the menu at the Mexican restaurant.” Then they asked little Gabriel about this, and these were her words, “I remember wanting to talk to them like I talk to my friends back at home, and I wanted to ask them if they had Jesus in their hearts. God just stuck the words into my head in Spanish.” They asked her if she could repeat what she had said to them in Spanish, and she was unable to do it. It is so exciting that God can use children in such a way. First of all, He used the ten-year-old girl to inspire her own church and send this group, and then, this little five-year-old that He used in a miraculous way to reach other children.

The point I want to drive home is you do not have to have all the answers. You do not have to have all the questions! All you have to have is a passion for Jesus, and He gives the opportunity, the ability, and the results. It is really about God, more than about us. The hunger is real. All around us, people are hungering for God. There is a greater search for spirituality in God today than ever before. Yesterday I sat down at my computer and went to the Google Internet search and typed in the word “spirituality.” It gave me 39,300,000 hits. I only looked at the first page and I did not go to all of the pages, much less to all of the sites listed.

Let me share some of the kinds of places where people are searching. I discovered that not only is there greater interest than ever before, but the search is in non-traditional, non-Christian ways. For example, “spirituality” comes from a Christian Science publishing society. Christian Science Publishing presents spirituality.com as their website. How about this one? Native American spirituality—a general overview with quotes, essays, and links. In depth articles define the New Age Movement and some of the core beliefs explain the traditions from which it is rooted describes the confusion caused by Or, Native American spirituality page, or Science of Spirituality. Spirituality, Indian Time News. Inspiration. Guru Space. Spirituality at Work. Meditation, Channeling, All types of different things are called “spirituality” in today’s world. There is a huge hunger out there and, unfortunately, there is a famine for God’s Word.

Let’s take it a little further. Because we have moved into a secular drift during the last of the 1800s into the last part of the 1900s. There is a huge secular drift in our culture in our society. Western civilization drifted toward secularism, but at the end of twentieth century, we developed a great interest in gods of our own making until Christianity plunged into a modern narcissism—the basic philosophy that says you can be your own god. You can find your own spark of divinity within you. The idea that you can come to understand a special message of truth, revealed only to the elite, is coming into contemporary Christianity. It is in the market place. Books like the best-selling *Da Vinci Code*, popularizes basic Gnostic philosophy which turns Scripture upside down and inside out, creating a need for a return to biblical Christianity more than ever!

The Bible is God’s Word. It unfolds the story of a God of love who created us, redeemed us, and is coming back to take us home with Him. But this is a message much of our world is no longer hearing. It is important that our neighbors hear it today.

The most popular theologian in America today is Oprah. The theology that she espouses is an eclectic mixture that really does not go with Scripture. Anything spiritual can fit into today’s consumer mind-set. You go into the cultural cabinet called “spirituality” and you pick and choose pieces that fit your desires, wants and feelings, and the certainty of God’s Word is no

longer there.

It is time that you and I know who we believe. That we walk with Him. That we live with Him in such an intense way, that we are able to share the simple truth of a God who loves us, who died for us, and wants to stay with us. It really is not that complicated.

Let me tell you why! God had a very important part in this. First of all, He creates the hunger. There is a fascinating story in Acts 10. Cornelius is the key figure in this story. Peter is the second key figure. Cornelius is a Roman centurion of the Italian Regiment. Notice verse two: "He and all of his family were devout and God fearing." He believed in God and followed Him to the best of his ability.

"One day at about three in the afternoon he had a vision. He distinctly saw an angel of God who came to him and said, 'Cornelius.' Cornelius stared at him in fear. 'What is it Lord?' He asked. The angel answered, 'Your prayers and gifts to the poor have come up as a memorial offering before God. Now, send men to Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter. He is staying with Simon, the tanner, whose house is by the sea'" (Acts 10:3-6).

Cornelius immediately sent two of his servants and a devout soldier who was one of his attendants to go and get Peter. At about noon the following day when they approached the city, Peter went up on the roof to pray. He is hungry and wants something to eat, and while he is there, he falls into a trance and has a vision.

You remember the story of the sheet of unclean animals being let down and the voice of God saying to him, "Eat!" Peter replied, "I have never eaten this kind of food." Then he realized that God was not talking to him about food, but about preparing his heart for what was about to happen to him. Notice verse seventeen:

While Peter was wondering about the meaning of the vision, the men sent by Cornelius found out where Simon's house was and stopped at the gate. They called out asking if Simon, who was known as Peter, was staying there. While Peter was still thinking about the vision, the Spirit said to him. "Simon, three men are looking for you, so get up and go downstairs. Do not hesitate to go with them, for I have sent them."

Peter went down and says, "I am the one you are looking for."

And they began to tell him the story. In other words, God created the hunger in Cornelius' heart and He provided the worker, through Peter, by changing His whole thinking.

In Luke 10:1-3, Jesus presents something very crucial.

After this, the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out two by two ahead of him to every town and place where he was about to go. He told them, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers to His harvest field."

Who is the one responsible for sending out workers? The Lord of the harvest. He does not say, "Go get more workers!" He is making it an issue of prayer. Ask the Lord of the harvest to send forth more workers.

There is more to this story. God convicted the worker with a total change of heart. Let's go back to Acts 10 and look at verse thirty.

When Peter got to Cornelius' house, Cornelius said to him, "Four days ago I was praying in my house at three in the afternoon and God spoke to me to send for you. That is why you are here." Notice verse 34. Then Peter began to speak. "I now realize how true it is that God does not show favoritism, but accept men from every nation that fear him and do what is right." A radical revolution has taken place in Peter's thinking. Up until now, Peter has believed the Gospel is only for the Jews. With this vision, with this calling, with the conviction of the Holy Spirit, Peter recognizes the Gospel is for the entire world. There is no favoritism. God wants to reach every single person around us with the good news of the Gospel. It is an incredible story, and ends, with a description of how the Holy Spirit fell upon Cornelius and his whole household, and they were all baptized because they accept the message of Jesus Christ.

Who provided the worker? God did. Who provided the hunger? God did. Who changed the worker's heart? God did. You see, from beginning to end, sharing what God had done for us is more about God than about us.

We do have a part. Let's look very quickly at what our part is. In Luke 10:2, it says "Pray, the Lord of the harvest." Then, "Go, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves" and, "Do not take a purse." (Luke 10:3-4). And Luke goes on to describe what kind of ministry they are going to have. Now, here is the point. He asks us to pray for workers, then turns around and says "Go." He does not ask us to go looking for other workers. He says, pray for it and recognize that every one of us is called as a minister of God to share the good news of what Jesus is doing for us. He does not say, "Go and give Bible studies." He simply says, "Go."

Please, do not misunderstand me. I am not speaking against Bible studies, but we have made Bible studies so much the focus of witnessing that we have forgotten that the key element of witnessing is my experience with Jesus Christ. There are thousands of Bible studies given every week that never lift up Jesus Christ.

Every one of us, if we have experienced God's saving love and His transforming grace, has a story to tell. We have the ability to share with those around us, what Jesus has done for us. That is the ministry to which we are called. We need to accept our calling as disciples. When Christ first called Peter, John, James, and Andrew, He said, "Come follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." We find the story in Matthew 4. With the initial calling to discipleship, comes the commissioning to reach out to those around us for Jesus Christ.

Let me put a little parenthesis in here. You will never continue in your spiritual growth at the pace God wants you to grow as long as you continue to refuse to share what He is doing in you. We could use the old metaphor of a glass. You can fill the glass with water and let it sit. What happens to the water? If you keep filling it what happens? It overflows and there is always fresh water available to those around. Whatever metaphor you want to use, the biblical truth is simple and very true. You and I are called to share Christ with those around us. We are called to lift Him up. We need to accept our ministry and share in the ministry of reconciling others with God.

In 2 Corinthians 5:14 it says, "The love of Christ constrains me, compels me." And, "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away. Behold all things are

made new.” He has given us the ministry of reconciliation. “The message of reconciliation” (verses 17-18). Why? Because if we have experienced being made one with God—being reconciled to God—we have the privilege of participating in the ministry of helping others via the same experience. Don’t make it too complicated.

Do you remember the story of the Gadarene demoniac of Luke 8? He wants to go with Jesus back into the boat, back to wherever He is going. His life has been changed! The demons have been cast out and he wants to be with Jesus. But Jesus says, “You cannot go with me. Why don’t you go back to your family and friends and tell them what great things the Master has done for you?”

Let me ask you something. Have you experienced God’s love during this week? If you have, you have something to share. If you have not, then you have a more basic problem. If our relationship with God is not fresh and new every day, where we are experiencing God’s love on a regular basis, then we need to deal with this. Do not concern yourself with the rest of my sermon or anything else I have preached. Deal with this issue. Establish your relationship with God first. But, if you have a relationship with God, if you are growing with Him, if you are experiencing His love and transforming power, then start sharing it with others, if you really want to experience His power. How? Let me suggest that we can do it too by building relationships.

I wish I had time to go into this story of Andrew. We find him in three different key stories. He is found in more places than that, but in three key stories. At the calling of the disciples, Andrew is one of the two followers of John the Baptist who goes to see Jesus. The first thing he does, after he has met Jesus is to go back to his brother, Peter, and tell him about Jesus. He says, “Come and see” (John 1: 35-50). In the same story, Philip does the same thing with Nathaniel. “Come and see.”

You see, it is not our task to convert people. It is simply our task to extend an invitation and invite them to build a relationship with Christ. To “come and see,” this Jesus I have met. That is all it is. Don’t make it too complicated.

There is more. It means sharing what we have heard. Second Timothy 2:1-2 is a little epistle from Paul to a young pastor. In it he says, “You then, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.” Notice the four spiritual generations in that one passage. Paul shares with Timothy. Timothy is to share with reliable men who are to share it with others. In other words, part and parcel of our Christian experience is sharing what Jesus means to us to those around us. Where do you start? Try your own home. Try your children.

I grew up in a pastor’s and church administrator’s home. We did not understand this. I really did not understand it until I was a preacher and had children of my own and they were getting older. I wish that when I was a small boy, my dad had sat down with me and simply shared what Jesus meant to him and how he found Jesus as his personal Savior. He did later on, and I can remember him doing it in public. I wished I had shared it with my children earlier in their journey, but there came a moment when Mary and I realized this need, and we sat down with our children. We simply shared this simple truth of the Gospel—Jesus loves us and we are all sinners in need of forgiveness. Jesus died for us and He has given us forgiveness. When we

believe and bring our sins to Him, we have forgiveness. It is that simple—the simple truth of the gospel. I had the joy of leading my children to know Jesus Christ as their personal Savior. That is where we need to start. We need to talk about it with our spouses and then with our friends.

I am not talking about the confrontation evangelism that has said, “If you were to die tonight would you go to heaven?” Now there may be a time for that, but I am simply talking about sharing the good news of what is happening in your life with those around you. Acts 5:40-42 tells the story of disciples who were whipped, because of their sharing. Yet they went back to the synagogue or temple and everywhere they went, they shared the Good News of what God had done for them. You could not keep them quiet! Whip them and they said, “I rejoice in the sufferings of my Lord.” You and I do not have that kind of opposition.

When is the last time you said to an employee working beside you, “You know what happened to me this last week?” How many of us say that kind of thing? We all do. Don’t we? When is the last time we said, “By the way, do you know what happened to me last week? I went deeper in my walk with God than ever before. I found new meaning in God’s love, and Jesus means more to me today than ever before.” Why is it we feel so uncomfortable doing this? If we found a million dollars, won the Publishers Clearing House Sweepstakes, everybody would know about it! First of all, they would announce it on the news. Why is it that the greatest Good News in the world is so hard to share? Could it be because we are not sure of that Good News in our own lives? That is what this discipleship process is all about. Making sure of our own walk with God. As we develop that walk with God, we need to share it with others around us. Not forcefully, but winsomely. Not confrontationally, but lovingly. Simply sharing what Christ has done.

You see, you and I have some key choices to make as disciples today. First of all, is maintaining our own walk with God. Are we willing to maintain intimacy with God on a daily basis? This is part of what we are talking about during these eight Sabbaths—what we are studying about these seven weeks of Steps to Discipleship.

1. We have to maintain intimacy with God.
2. Be willing to share. Don’t go out and force it. Just be willing to share.
3. Ask God to bring hungry people to us. Put the burden back on Him. Remember, He is the one who creates the hunger. He is the one who provides the workers. Don’t go looking for your next “victim.” Ask Him to bring to you the person He wants you to share Jesus with. Put the burden on Him. He is able to handle it.

Take care of your own walk with God. Be willing to share, and then ask Him to bring you that person. Be willing to tell your own story. Simply, what great things Jesus has done for you. You see, if a five-year-old can do it, maybe we need to become like children so we can do it too.

I am wondering who God has brought into your life. Who needs to hear the sweet invitation of Jesus to come and know Him? To walk with Him? Who has God brought into your workplace or your home that is hungry to know the story of Jesus? I don’t know. You may not know right now, but if you will make it an issue of prayer, and if you are willing, you too can be a minister of God’s grace, helping someone experience what you have felt. You can do it too.

▷ PURPOSE

The purpose of this sixth sermon is to focus on what it means to be part of the Body of Christ—the Church, and how that affects our relationships with God and those around us. The invitation is to accept our role as part of the Body of Christ.

▷ KEY PASSAGES

The key Biblical passages for this sermon are:

- 1 Peter 2:5, 9
- Ephesians 1:22-23
- 1 Corinthians 12:12-27
- Hebrews 10:25
- John 4:24
- Romans 12:10
- Romans 14:19
- Ephesians 5:21

▷ KEY POINTS

The key points which need to be included in this sermon are:

- We are the Church—connected to Christ and to each other.
- This changes the way we see ourselves and others.
- This changes the way we act towards and with each other.
- Our choice is to recognize, accept who we are, and then live it out in our daily lives.

THEME

As members of God's Church, we are part of His spiritual body. That means we are part of something bigger than ourselves. Our relationship with God and our identity as part of the Body of Christ determine how we relate to each other. Discipleship cannot be separated from Body life.

CHURCH—WHAT DOES IT “*MEAN*”?

- Is it a human organization?
 - A country club for saints?
 - A hospital for sinners?
- Is it the “Body of Christ?”
 - A mystical mystery?
 - A divine reality?
 - A new identity?
- What are the implications for how we live?

WE ARE THE “*CHURCH*”!

- We are God's work. (1 Peter 2:5, 9)
- We are connected to Christ. (Ephesians 1:22-23)
 - It starts with a divine act.
 - Christ is the Head.
 - We are His fullness.
- We are connected to each other. (1 Corinthians 12:12-27)
 - We have a new identity. (v. 12, 27)
 - We have new relationships. (v. 18)

IMPLICATIONS OF OUR NEW “**IDENTITY**”

- We see ourselves differently.
- We see others differently:
 - In the church.
 - In the world around us.
- We act differently.
 - We come together. (Hebrews 10:25)
 - We worship “in spirit and truth.” (John 4:24)
 - We honor others above ourselves. (Romans 12:10)
 - We build each other up. (Romans 14:19)
 - We submit to each other. (Ephesians 5:21)

PRACTICAL “**POINTS**” FOR BEING GOD’S CHURCH:

- Recognize we are God’s Church—the Body of Christ.
- Maintain our connection with the Head—Christ.
- Choose to live each day as His Church.

We are His Body. Are we learning to live out that new reality? Frankly, the topic of the Church as the Body of Christ is not really popular within today's culture. Even today's Christianity.

We have drifted into an independent isolationistic form of Christianity. We come together from time to time, but we are more focused on what it means for "me" to know Jesus personally, than what it means to be part of the Body of Christ. In fact, I believe we have lost sight of the biblical reality of being the Body of Christ. We are only going to begin to explore that reality today. Why? Because as members of God's Church we are part of His spiritual Body. This is a biblical reality, and it means we are part of something bigger than ourselves.

Recently, I received an e-mail advertisement for a new book by George Barna called, *The Revolution*. Dr. Barna has been studying trends within North American Christianity for the last twenty-five years and especially the last five to eight years, and he predicts what the Church of the future will be like. I have not yet read the book, but will. As I read a review of the book in *Christianity Today*, I found that some of the predictions are typical of where we are as a culture. One of the cutting edge aspects of contemporary spirituality and Christianity is that I can be a Christian by having my church experience through the Internet. This is one of the new trends that is gaining strength. Internet Christianity. Internet spirituality. The prediction is that within the next twenty years the number of people attending an organized church will decrease significantly. The number of people who are a part of an organized denomination will decrease, especially when you look at percentages and proportions of the overall population.

This is nothing new. It has been happening for the last number of years. We are fortunate as Seventh-day Adventists to be part of a Church that is still growing dynamically around the world. We are now over fourteen million members around the world. Many other churches are losing members and decreasing in size. All we have to do is look at our own congregation and we discover very quickly that the percentage of members who attend regularly every week is decreasing and has continued to decrease over the last ten to fifteen years. Church is less important in the lives of average Christians today. Our relationship with God and our identity as part of the Body of Christ determine how we relate to each other. One of the things I hope we can understand from this week's study is that discipleship cannot be separated from body life. There is no such thing as an isolated, individual Christian. Yes, it is true, we make individual choices to accept Jesus as Savior, but the moment we accept Him as Savior, we become part of His Body. We are part of a larger home, and we need to explore some of the implications of what it means to be part of the Body of Christ.

I remember one young man who came to me and said, "I do not want to be part of this church."

I replied, "Oh, why is that?"

I was visiting his church and had no understanding of its background and what was happening in the church.

He said, "It is filled with a bunch of hypocrites."

"Okay. What brings you to that conclusion?"

"Well, they claim one thing and live another."

I said, “You know, I am tempted to ask you a question. Do you ever claim one thing and live another?”

“Oh, but that is different,” he responded.

I asked, “What’s the difference?”

He had no answer. I began to think about that, and I realized the word hypocrite needs to be redefined. Most of the time we think a hypocrite is one who claims to be something they are not. Let me suggest an alternate definition. A hypocrite is someone who claims to be something he never *intends* to become.

Every Christian claims to be something she or he has not yet attained. The reality is, the moment we accept Jesus as Savior we are a new creation, and we are becoming new! It is not a finished work. We always claim more than what we have attained. It is part of the growth process. The issue comes when we claim something we never intend to become. Then it becomes hypocrisy.

This young man went on to say, “I do not like this church because of all its rules and regulations. It has a bunch of things that I just do not agree with.”

Now, just let me ask a question of those eighteen and younger. “Do you always agree with what Mom and Dad say?”

Here is the point. The fact that you do not agree with the rules Mom and Dad set down, does not stop you from being part of that family, does it?

We live in a world of shifting values. The family is falling apart. Parents are failing in what they ought to do, and they find that this church expects something of people. It has standards and holds to those standards and speaks of requirements and definitions and so on.

It is not just our Church saying this. Other churches find meaning in expectations. A *Newsweek* interview with Gordon Hinkley, the Latter-day Saints prophet quoted: “They find here, a rock that is solid and strong and true and isn’t wavering with every gust of wind.” A church member sent me an e-mail with a hyperlink to this article and referred me to the closing. He asked the question, “Could we say this of our Church? Could we make the statement that this is a rock solid, strong and true Church and is not wavering with every gust of wind?”

I am not sure we could. I would like to say, yes, but the reality is that there has been a lot of wavering and drifting. There is a loss of identity in what it means to be a Seventh-day Adventist in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Please do not misunderstand me, I am not interested in going back to a religion based on rules, but in any relationship there will have to be clear boundaries, well-communicated expectations, and shared commitments. These are part of any relationship—husband and wife; parent and child. In fact, one of the problems in many homes is often that we do not have shared boundaries. We do not have clear expectations. We do not have shared commitments, and then we wonder why homes struggle to stay tied together.

Being part of the Body of Christ can have a tremendous potential for helping us in our spiritual journey, even when we do not always agree with that Body in every point or detail. Let's explore this together.

Church, what does it really mean? Is it a human organization? Is it a country club for saints? Is it a hospital for sinners? I have heard all of these terms used in talking about a church.

Some people say, "I do not want to join a church, it is just a human organization."

Well, if that is all it is, I do not want to join it either. If that is all this is—a human organization which alternates between a hospital for sinners or a country club for saints, where you pay your dues and you attend once in awhile and you feel like you belong to somebody or to a group that has similar values. If that is all it is, then join Kiwanis or the Rotary Club.

Let's look at it from another perspective. Is it the Body of Christ? That is what Scripture tells us. Is it a mystical mystery? Something that goes beyond our ability to define? When we say the words, "the Body of Christ," can you and I fully understand what this means? Are we His arms and legs? Maybe, when it comes to mission, or does it mean something different? Something radically deeper? So different, that we can never fully explain it. Never fully comprehend it but only experience it? This is why I have used the term mystical.

There is nothing wrong with a mystical experience. The problem is found in mysticism when our search focuses on only the mystical. We have all had mystical experiences. We would not be here if we had not. How many of you have ever felt God very close to you? How do you know? That was a mystical experience. You knew it happened. You had the sensation. It was real for you, but there is no way you can explain it to someone who has never experienced it.

You have experienced it when you say, "I sensed God's presence close to me." We all understand what that means. It is something bigger than us. We cannot explain it.

This is part of what it means to be the Body of Christ. It is a mystical mystery. It is a divine reality, absolutely. Christ is the head, we are the Body. Now notice, it is the plural "we." I am not the Body. I may be a finger or a hand, but I am not the Body. In other words, I have no identity as a Church, except in relationship to you. It is interesting that throughout the New Testament there is more written to the Church in general, as a corporate body, than to individual Christians. Why? Because, when we become Christians, when we accept Christ, we are made part of His Body, and now the message comes to us as a body, not as individuals. That ought to tell us something.

Then, is this a new identity? Clearly, there is no Christian apart from the Body of Christ. When Paul writes about being a new creation—"If any man be in Christ, he is a new creation. Old things are passed away. Behold, all things are made new" (2 Corinthians 5:17)—he immediately goes into the plural. He does not say you, he says we. "He has given to us, the ministry of reconciliation." Why? Our identity as Christians cannot be separated from our identity as part of the Body of Christ. Now, we are not going to get into the debate about, is it the Seventh-day Adventist Church or all churches? Is it the invisible Church or the visible Church? Those are theological issues we can discuss over the dinner table sometime.

I want to explore the implications with you this morning. What does it mean to be the Body of Christ? What does it mean to be identified with Jesus Christ, as the Head? We are the Church.

Let's start out with a key biblical point. We are God's work. It is not our work. The Church is not something we create. Look at 1 Peter 2:4-5 and 9. The Apostle Peter writes,

“As you come to him, the living Stone—rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him—you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

We are a spiritual house, built by God. We are a spiritual priesthood. Look at verse 9. “You are a chosen people. A royal priest-hood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

Now, it is possible for human beings to come together and form a group and call themselves a church. Biblically, that does not make them a church. The creation of a Church, as the Body of Christ is a divine act, done by God. He builds us into a spiritual household. Those of you studying *Steps to Discipleship* this week will explore this in the Ephesians 2—what it means to be built into the Household of God—into the Temple of God.

Why? Because I want us to understand from beginning to end, the Church is more about God than about us. It is about God and who He is and who we are in Him. That should change our attitude because so often, when we come to Church, we say, “This is what I think, versus, this is what you think.” Really, if this is the Body of Christ, who cares what you think? Who cares what I think? It ought to be, “What does Christ think, as the Head of this Body?” This ought to define how we see ourselves. How we behave. What kind of boundaries we establish. What kind of guidelines we develop for growth within this Body. These ought to be determined by who God is, not by what we think as members of this human organization. For as long as we continue to function on this level, we deny God's divine creation of His Body.

Next, we are connected to Christ. Ephesians is the epistle that has more to say about the Church than any other single book. Its whole focus is about the Church, to the Church, and for the Church. Ephesians 1:22 and 23 speaks of Christ's resurrection. How He was raised and seated at the right hand of God and given all power and authority. Then Paul concludes with the following statement, “And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything in the church which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.”

There are incredible implications here, but here are just a couple of highlights: First, there is no Church without Jesus Christ. There is no Church without His divine act of making us one in Him. There is no Church if we are not connected to Him.

Let's just turn that around for a moment and look at the implications. You may be a baptized member of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but if you do not have a connection to Jesus Christ, you are not a part of His Church. That is radical isn't it? What is important in order to be part of a church is the connection to Jesus Christ, the Head. What defines the Body is the Head, which ought to say something to us about our attempts to redefine the Church according to our desires. It starts with the divine act—Christ is the Head and we are His fullness. I love that thought. When the Body comes together as we are together here this morning, we are the fullness of God. That is what Ephesians 1:22 and 23 says. As His Church connected to the Head, in us is the fullness of God.

If we are His Church and the fullness of God, then the only limit to what this Church can do is His will for us. There are no limits to His power available to us as long as we are connected to Him—as long as we are following His will. As long as we are dependent upon Him we have all the fullness of God. The full power of God is available to this Body to do His will. The only limit? Are we doing His will? Now this is exciting for me, as a pastor. Because if we look to the future, we can dream big dreams. The only limits to what we can become are His will for us as a body. How often do we allow our own feeble minds to limit God's potential for His Church?

Secondly, we are connected to God, but we are also connected to each other. Look at 1 Corinthians 12:12-27. We find Paul repeating this concept of being connected to one another over and over again. In Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12-14, and Ephesians 2, 3, and “The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts and though all of its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ” (1 Corinthians 12:12, 27). We are one Body.

From time to time, I hear Church leaders talking about the need for unity in the church. Unity is a by-product of our oneness with God. When we are one with Him, we become one with each other. Let's look at verse 27: “Now, you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.” Paul talks about how in the Church, “God has appointed first of all apostles, second prophets, and different gifts.” But the statement is very clear. We are all connected to each other. We have a new identity and that identity is who we are in the Church.

Therefore, if you have accepted Jesus Christ as your Savior, being part of the Body of Christ becomes one of the dominant controlling factors in your life. Notice, I did not say, “What the preacher said becomes the dominant controlling factor in your life.” I know better than that. Being part of the Body becomes a dominant controlling factor in this new identity. Why? I no longer think of myself in isolation. I am no longer just me. I am me as a Christian member of the Body of Christ. This has to change how I think about myself and how I think about others.

Therefore we have new relationships. Look at verse 18: “But in fact, God has arranged the parts of the body, every one of them, just as He wanted them to be.” You do not like your role in the Body of Christ? Take it up with God. He is the one who decided where you are going to be located in this Body. Do not argue with the nominating committee. Do not argue with the pastoral staff. Deal with it. Build a bridge and get over it. Who you are in the Body of Christ is determined by God in His divine appointment, His divine calling, His divine act of making you part of His Body.

If we would just read the whole passage in Romans 12, we would understand how vitally important every single part of the Body really is. You may think you are only the big toe and you are not very important, but just talk to anyone who has lost their big toe and has had to learn to walk all over again. The large toe it is a major factor in the ability to walk and helps you maintain your balance.

One of the points God brings out through the Apostle Paul is, there is no part of the Body that can be called insignificant or unimportant. Everyone of us is needed in this thing we call the Church. Everyone of us has vital part to play. If your part of the Body is not functioning, Paul says, “If one suffers, we all suffer.”

In other words, if you are not playing your role or doing your part in the Body of Christ, the entire Body suffers. You are needed. So what are the implications of our new identity? First

of all, we see ourselves differently. Then, we see others differently. I no longer can look at myself in isolation. Neither can you. But I can no longer look at you in the same way I used to because we are a new creation in Christ. Second Corinthians 5:16 says, “We look at one another, not after the human fashion as we once looked at Christ.” Why? Because we are all new creations in Christ. It changes the way I see myself, and it changes the way I see others in the Church and in the community, and in the world around us.

The biblical reality is that you and I are intimately connected in Jesus Christ. Unless I look at you that way, I am operating outside of biblical guidelines. As the Body of Christ, I look at the community as people needing to know Jesus Christ—not know the Body or church, but know the Head. The connection is always through the Head.

Because there is a new identity as a Body of Christ, we will act differently. Hebrews 10:25, talks about not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together. Because we are the Body of Christ, we come together to act as a body, to worship God as a body, to experience body life—at least once a week. In other words, when you do not participate in corporate worship, you are losing part of the joy and privilege of being the Body of Christ. Now, I know the temptation to stay at home.

I am reminded of a story of a fellow who is in bed at ten o’clock in the morning and his mother is knocking on the door and saying “You’ve got to get up! You’ve got to go to the Church.” He says, “Why should I do that?” His Mom says, “You’ve just got to get up. You’ve got to go to Church.” Finally, he says, “Give me two good reasons why I need to do that?” His mother says. “Number one, you’re forty-four years old, and number two, you are the pastor.”

We are all tempted to skip out on church from time to time, but being part of the Body is coming together to celebrate who we are, as a body. When we do not come together, we lose out on that connection. It is not a matter of having to go to Church. It is a natural function of the Body.

We also worship Him in spirit and in truth. In the story of the Samaritan woman at the well, she asked the question: “Our fathers worship on this mountain. Your fathers say, that mountain. Where should we worship?” Jesus gives the very succinct answer. He says, “God is a Spirit and he must be worshipped in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24).

The stronger your understanding of biblical truth is, and the stronger your connection with Christ, the better your worship can be. That is one of the reasons I am proud to be a Seventh-day Adventist. We have the most comprehensive, logical system of biblical truth of any organized Church that I know of. I am not saying that arrogantly. If there were another system of truth out there that was better than what we have, I would be out there. I am here, because of the understanding of biblical truth that is found within our Church system. Without our connection to Christ, that understanding of truth is only information. So we worship Him in spirit and in truth as the Body of Christ.

Not only do we act differently, in that respect. We also honor others above ourselves. Romans 12:10 says, “in honor preferring one another” (KJV). The New International Bible says, “We honor others above ourselves.” Frankly, I do not like that one. It goes against every grain of my body. This old selfish human being would rather focus on me, and not submit myself to Him—not honor somebody else, but, as part of the Body, Paul guides us. It is my role to

honor you, more than myself—to put you before myself—to put you above myself.

Is it easy? No. Is it even possible for a group of human being? No. That is why we have to die and be born again. It is only possible in the Body of Christ when we are connected to the Head. But when we are connected, then we begin to grow and develop the habits and the abilities to, in honor, prefer one another, to put others before ourselves—even when making choices about lifestyles and value decisions.

Romans 14:19 talks about how we build each other up. One of the great purposes of the Body of Christ is to build each other up. If you are intimately connected to Christ and are part of this Church body, you will be stronger next year and better spiritually than what you are today because the rest of the body helps build you up. Why? Because a part of our role in this new identity of being a Church is to reach out and help each other grow. In other words, it is not just the pastoral team that is here to mentor and disciple you. Each one of us is a peer discipler of each other. We are to help each other walk with Jesus Christ. It is a journey we are on together. We have made discipleship far too complex so that only a specialist can do it. There is a simple way to see and understand discipleship, I walk with God and develop a relationship with Him, so that I can walk with and build a relationship with you. Thus, helping you as you build a relationship with Him and somebody else. Every one of us is involved in helping build each other up. That is part of what it means to be the Body of Christ.

We also act differently in that we submit to each other (Eph 5:21). Now, if the wives here do not like verse 22, where it says, “Wives submit yourselves to a husband,” you need to go back and read the whole context to understand what Paul is saying. He says, “Submit yourselves, one to another.” I do not like that one either. It also goes against the grain! I will do anything to come out on top. There is a competitive streak within me. If I get into a game, I will run myself to death to help my team win. If it is a one-on-one game, you had better look out, because that competitive streak just comes out. Then I realize that it does not just happen in games. It happens when I am driving down the highway. It happens when I am working with others, because the natural tendency of my life is to want to be first.

Paul says, “Submit yourselves one to another.” Ouch! That is what part of being the Body of Christ means. I learn to be part of the Body and submit myself to the wider group and to other individuals to make decisions based on the welfare of the Body, not just what I want. Do you see the difference?

When we learn to function in this way, we truly become the Body of Christ. There are some key things we have to learn.

First, recognize we are God’s Church—the Body of Christ.

A few years ago I was the ministerial secretary in the Upper Columbia Conference. A church asked me to come and visit with the Church Board. There was a lady there who wanted to be baptized into Christ, but not into the church. Now, that seems to make sense, until you study the biblical concept of the Church. So I went and visited with the Board. Then I visited with this young lady who was active in the Church and was attending regularly. She was more involved in ministry than most of the members of the congregation, but she simply did not want to be part of the church. She just wanted to be baptized into Christ.

The pastor explained that he could not do that and the Church Board was putting pressure

on the pastor to do it anyway. He said, “I cannot do it, because the Conference won’t let me.” The Board suggested that they ask someone from the Conference to come to the church to talk to them. We explored the biblical meaning of some of the things I have explored with you today.

When we conversed, the young woman said, “But I do not want to do that.”

I said, “Then don’t! Wait until the Holy Spirit makes it clear to you that you are to be part of the Body of Christ. Because baptism means, joining Christ and His Body. When God makes it clear, you’ll be ready.”

About six months later, I saw the pastor at a regional pastors’ meeting. He said, “You are not going to believe what happened! Last Sabbath I had a baptism, and we were presenting the candidates for baptism when one of the Elders sitting behind this young lady leaned over to her and said, “Isn’t it time that you made your decision too?”

She looked around at him, startled, and said, “What do you mean?”

“Well, do not you think it is time that you became part of this Church body?”

She looked back and said, “I think it is!”

So the Elder took her back to the area where they were getting ready for baptism and said, “Pastor, we have another person to be baptized today.”

She understood everything we taught. She had been part of the Church for two years, but the issue of becoming a formal part of the Body was more than she could handle. That day, the Holy Spirit used an Elder to ask her the question and then spoke to her heart, and she was baptized that day.

I saw her several months later at a regional meeting and she came up to me saying, “Pastor, I am so glad you made me wait because, at the time, I wanted to be baptized into Christ and I did not understand what it meant to be part of His Body. But over the last few months I have been studying and the Holy Spirit brought the conviction to my heart that it was time for me to be part of His Body.”

That is the only way it can happen—when the Holy Spirit brings that conviction home.

Later I saw that Elder and he told me, “You know, I had never thought talking to anybody like that. That is not me. But I was sitting there behind her, and I don’t know what got into me, but I just couldn’t help it. I leaned toward her and, before I knew it, I asked her. Then I wondered, “What in the world am I doing?” What is exciting is to know that the Holy Spirit used me to help reach her.”

I said, “That is what it means to be part of the Body of Christ. In honor, preferring one another. Building each other up. Being the hands and mouth of God—to act, in the name of Jesus.”

We need to recognize that we are God’s Church, the Body of Christ. We need to maintain our connection with the Head—Jesus Christ—because without Him, there is no Body.

Finally, we need to choose to live each day as His Church. I do not know where you are in your relationship to this concept of the Body, but I do know that we are like many other

Adventist churches and like many other Christian churches. Most of us have not spent much time thinking what it means to be part of the corporate Body. I want to challenge us—all of us—including myself, to spend some time reflecting on this and asking the Holy Spirit to teach us how we can live better as His Body.

Some of you that are here today have never become part of this Church body, and if the Holy Spirit has been convicting you to make this kind of decision—to be part of this Church Body—we want to welcome you. We want to encourage you. We want to invite you to make that step. The Church is the most exciting group in the world today for connecting to Jesus Christ. There is no limit to what we can become and what we can do in His name.

Loving Father, teach us to know you. Teach us to walk with you. Teach us to love one another. Teach us to live our new identity as the Body of Christ. For we pray in Jesus' name, Amen.

▷ PURPOSE

The purpose of this seventh sermon is present the fact that when we become disciples by accepting Jesus as Savior and Lord, we are gifted by the Holy Spirit with spiritual gifts for ministry. The invitation is to accept our calling to ministry in Christ's name.

▷ KEY PASSAGES

The key Biblical passages for this sermon are:

- Mark 1:17
- Acts 1:8
- 1 Peter 2:5, 9
- 2 Corinthians 5:20
- Romans 12:6
- 1 Corinthians 12:7
- 1 Corinthians 12:11
- Ephesians 4:7
- 1 Corinthians 12:6
- Matthew 28:18-20
- Ephesians 4:11-13

▷ KEY POINTS

The key points to be included in this sermon are:

- To be a disciple means to be a minister with a unique priesthood.
- We are gifted for ministry with different gifts, for the common good, and as determined by the Holy Spirit.
- We are empowered for ministry by God working in and through us.
- Our challenge is to discover our gifts and accept our calling to ministry.

THEME

As members of the Body of Christ, we are each called to ministry and equipped for that ministry. God has placed each of us where we are to fulfill His mission of helping people know and walk with God. Ministry is part of our discipleship.

DISCIPLE MEANS “*MINISTER*”

- The original call—“Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.” (Mark 1:17)
- The parting promise—“. . . you will receive power . . . you will be my witnesses.” (Acts 1:8)
- A unique priesthood: (1 Peter 2:5, 9)
 - Worship
 - Intercession
 - Teaching
- A new identity. (2 Corinthians 5:20)

WE ARE “*GIFTED*” FOR MINISTRY

- We each have different gifts. (Romans 12:6)
- Given for the common good. (1 Corinthians 12:7)
- Given as the Spirit determines. (1 Corinthians 12:11; Ephesians 4:7)

WE ARE “*EMPOWERED*” FOR MINISTRY

- God works in us. (1 Corinthians 12:6)
- Jesus promised to be with us. (Matthew 28:18-20)
- Training members for ministry is a pastoral role. (Ephesians 4:11-13)

“DISCOVERING” OUR MINISTRIES

- What gifts has God given us?
- What burdens or convictions has God laid on our hearts?
- What opportunities has God placed around you?
- What is the Body of Christ affirming in you?

WHERE DO WE “GO” FROM HERE?

- Accept our calling to ministry.
- Claim Christ’s promised presence.
- Explore and discover our gifts.
- Begin ministry with courage.

Equipped for ministry! Every one of us is equipped for ministry. In fact, as members of the Body of Christ, we are each called to minister and are equipped for that ministry. There is not single a person here who is not called to ministry. If you are involved in some form of direct ministry within this church family or representing this church family to a community, would you please stand?

Every time I turn around, I find new people involved in ministry and that is exciting. Look at those who are standing. Isn't this exciting? Each one of us has the opportunity to be part of this incredible team. As members of the Body of Christ, you are each called to minister and are equipped for ministry. God has placed each of us where we are in order to fulfill His mission of helping others know and walk with God.

Let me say it another way. If you are not involved in helping others walk with God, you are missing the reason you were created. You were created for the ministry of touching people and helping them know and walk with Jesus Christ. You were not created to be a teacher, or a physician, or a businessman, or a computer technician or whatever. Those are occupations that give us a living. They can be opportunities for ministry.

The difference is the attitude with which we come to our jobs, and who we represent on our jobs and in our lives. Not only that, ministry is part of your discipleship. In fact, I would suggest to you that disciple means minister. You can not be a mature disciple and not be a minister. To the degree that you fail to become involved in some form of ministry representing God, being used by God, being filled with God to touch someone else—to the extent that you are not involved with that—you will fail to grow in spiritual maturity. It is part of our discipleship.

The original call to Peter, James, John and Andrew was “Come, follow me and I will make you fishers of men.” I will make you ministers. In other words, the moment He called them into a discipleship relationship, He gave them the task in which they would be involved. I want to suggest that in one way or another, every one of us, if we are walking with God, will become fishers of men. We will be touching other's lives for the kingdom.

I am not talking about always giving Bible studies and preparing people for baptism. There is a set of gifts to help people do that. But God needs all kinds of gifts. Not only was it in the original call, the parting promise of Jesus in Acts 1 says, “You will receive power. Wait in Jerusalem, and after that, you will be my witnesses. First, in Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria, then the uttermost parts of the world.”

In other words, from beginning to the end of Jesus' ministry, as He disciplined those who followed Him, ministry was at the core of their calling, their purpose and their mission. As disciples walking with Jesus Christ, you and I need to catch the same vision. You say, “Well, you know I am old; I cannot do very much. I do not have good health.” What do you mean? You can still pray, can't you? One of the most important ministries a congregation can have and needs to have more of, is intercessory prayer. As members of a church family, there is not one single thing we do that we can afford to do in our human strength. Every bit of what we do needs to be done in the power and presence of God. Everything we do as a Church family, and in our individual homes, needs to be bathed with prayer. Every one of us has the opportunity to be involved in some kind of ministry, and it starts with prayer.

Finally, we come down to the fact that we are a unique priesthood. Please open your Bibles to 1 Peter 2:5, 9. In this passage the Apostle Peter presents a fascinating perspective on who we are. Let us begin with verse 4. “As you come to Him, the living Stone rejected by men but chosen by God and precious to him, you—also like living stones—are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

Look at verse 9. “You are a chosen people. A royal priesthood. A holy nation. A people belonging to God that you may declare the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His wonderful light. “

Let me put that in my own words. You are a priest. A holy priest. A royal priest. What does this mean? During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, Calvin, Zwingli and other reformers called for the reformation of Christianity that would focus and be founded on one primary principal—salvation by grace. They said, you can go to God without having to go through another human being, and they began to teach the concept of the priesthood of all believers.

There is only one problem. Calvin, Zwingli, Luther and all the rest of the reformers stopped short. They said, “Priesthood means, if you are a royal priest, a holy priest, you have the opportunity of going directly to God. You do not have to go through a human priest.’ Well, this is wonderfully good news! But priests never exist for themselves. They exist to minister to others, and priestly ministry is focused on worshiping God and leading a congregation in worship. Do you realize that when you plan a worship service, you function as a priest? In leading a corporate group in a time of worship, everyone involved in planning a worship service are there as ministering priests to help the congregation worship God. Not only that, when you sit in the pew and sing, you are worshiping God. You are acting as a priest, worshiping the King of Kings. It is part of our ministry as holy priests, as royal priests.

Not only do priests worship and lead out in worship, they are also involved in intercession. Interceding before God for others—praying for others.

How many of you have a personal prayer list? Let me encourage each one of you to develop a personal prayer list and maintain it. I have a two-level prayer list. I have a list of people and situations that I pray for all of the time. It is on my regular list. Then I have a current list consisting of urgent requests that come to mind. Actually, I have a third level that I do not use as much as I used to, when traveling all over the world. That is, people would ask me to remember them in prayer. Well, I might never see them again! Ours was a one time encounter. But because I came from the General Conference and I taught a leadership seminar of some kind, they wanted me to pray for them. So, I would pray for them and they would say, “Would you please continue to remember me in prayer?”

I developed a contract with God, and I would say to them, “As often as God brings your name or face to mind, I will lift you in prayer to God.” It was amazing! I could be on an airplane and suddenly somebody’s face or name would come to mind and I would realize that this was somebody God wanted me to pray for. I would sit on the plane and pray for them. I have awakened in the middle of the night with somebody’s name on my mind. I still do that day by

day. Why? Because this is part of my ministry and yours. Interceding before God. Interceding for others.

Not only do we have worship, and intercession. There is also teaching. The priests taught the Law of God to the people. Part of our role is to teach people how to live with God. It can start in our homes. It could be with our neighbor, our friends, our spouses. We teach as fellow learners on a journey together. We are peer learners; peer disciples—fellow sojourners and pilgrims on a pilgrimage together.

There is a fourth dimension. The fourth ministry of a priest or disciple is reconciliation. The ministry of 2 Corinthians 5:14-21. Every one of us is involved in helping to reconcile people to God. To help them discover the incredible good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. This is what we are all about. How do we do this?

We need to begin by recognizing that we have a new identity in Christ. Second Corinthians 5:20 calls us ambassadors of God. An ambassador is not only on a task or a mission. He has an identity. What does an ambassador do in a foreign country? He or she represents her home country. When standing up to speak, that ambassador is speaking on behalf of and in the name of the country he or she represents. You and I have a new identity as ambassadors. We are ambassadors of the Kingdom of God. That is who we are, twenty-four/seven. Being an ambassador is not a task you take up at seven o'clock in the morning and lay down at five o'clock in the afternoon. It is the identity of who we are in Jesus Christ. Every one of us is an ambassador of Jesus Christ. But not only are we ambassadors, we are gifted for ministry.

Romans 12 tells us that we each have different gifts. This passage is one of Paul's initial presentations of the concept of spiritual gifts for equipping believers for ministry. Look at verse six. "We have different gifts according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith." And the passage continues and talks about different gifts.

(Use an illustration that demonstrates someone using their gifts for ministry.)

In our congregation there are many musical gifts, but there are many other gifts and every one of them is vital. Actually, it is a little nerve racking to get up in front of this congregation every Sabbath and preach. You can only do that in the context of the presence of God. Every one of us has different gifts. Aren't you glad that we don't all have the same gift? Just think! If, from the time you got here at nine or ten o'clock on Sabbath morning until you left at twelve-thirty, you had to listen to me for two and a half hours, that would do something for church growth wouldn't it? We have a combination of gifts. Different kinds of music. We have teachers. We have some incredibly gifted adults and young people who give of their time every week and we never see them because they are in the children's division teaching the little children. My worst nightmare would to be a Cradle Roll or Kindergarten teacher. I don't think I could survive, and I don't think they would either.

We have gifted people who fill that ministry in a very capable way. That is the wonder of the Church—the Body of Christ. There are different gifts. Not only are there different gifts, in 1 Corinthians 12, the next major passage about spiritual gifts, the apostle Paul says in verse seven, "Now to each one manifestations of the Spirit is given for the common good."

The purpose of that gift is not for our own entertainment. It is to build up the Body of Christ. It is for the good of the entire Body. So, when you are using your gift, you are blessing the Body. Let me turn that around. When you allow God to work through you in using your gift, you allow God to bless His Church through your ministry. Different gifts and one common purpose for the common good of the Body of Christ. They are given as the Spirit determines.

Let's look at Chapter 12:11: "All these, are the work of the same Spirit and he gives each one just enough as he determines." Now I could say, "I wish I had been given the gift of piano playing."

I realize the gift does not come without a lot of hard work. But I could have practiced just as much as some of our best pianists and it still would fail, because that is not one of my gifts. I've got a lot of other gifts, but not that one. I love music. I love to sing. I play piano at home, by ear, for my own entertainment, but never to lead a worship group. I struggle to get three fingers to work together at the same time. Where would we be, if we did not have these gifts?

Aren't you glad it is the Holy Spirit that makes this determination, instead of us? So, if you do not like the gifts that you have, take it up with God, not with the nominating committee. It really is based upon what the Holy Spirit determines—how He and where He wants to use us.

Not only are we gifted for ministry, we are empowered for ministry. First of all, God works in us. Look at Chapter 12:6: "There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men." God works in us. And look at Matthew 28:18-20, when Jesus gave the great commission to go into all the world to make disciples. He did it in the context of the promise of His presence. Verse 18: "All power and authority is given to me in heaven and earth and for going into all the world and make disciples." Verse 20: "And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." God does not just give us the gift and say "go and put it to work." What we do has to be empowered by the Living presence of God.

I am so glad that when I stand to speak when our musicians sit at the piano or stand up to lead, or our technical crew run the equipment, there is not one thing we do in the Church that could be done in human strength alone. I am so glad that God's promise is with us; that He will be with us at all times. He empowers our ministry. He works through us. He gives us gifts, and He promises to be with us.

Now, we come to one pivotal point of Church life—not just for this sermon—but for our Church life. As a pastor, I recognize the need for pastors to focus on what God has called us to be. Look at Ephesians 4:11-14: "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to the prophets, some to the evangelists and some to be pastors and teachers." For what purpose? Notice verse 12, "To prepare God's people for works of service so that the body of Christ may be built up." Who builds up the body of Christ? Not the pastor! To prepare God's people—the Revised Standard Version, says "To equip the saints." The role of the pastor is to train or prepare members for their ministry of building the body of Christ. Every single member here is part of the team that God placed here to build up the body of Christ. And if you are not involved in ministry, the Church will never become what God wants it to be. It is that simple. If we want the Church to become all that God wants it to be, then we need to discover our ministry and we need to get involved in our ministry, because there is no such thing as an

inactive Christian. That is a contradiction of terms. An oxymoron. Spectator Christianity is something for the history book. Today's culture demands Christians who are alive with a passion for Jesus Christ, filled with the presence of His spirit and ministering in the name of Christ. It demands an entire Church.

We may be at different levels of ministry, different areas of ministry, different stages of spiritual growth, but every single member here has been equipped and called to ministry. The question is, how do you discover your ministry? How do you discover where God wants you to minister? Let me suggest four key questions.

1. What gifts has God given to you?

They will vary, you may say. Well, I'm not sure what your gifts are. Make it an issue of prayer. Focus on these passages: 1 Corinthians 12 - 14. Romans 12, Ephesians 4, and explore what gifts are in Scripture, and then look at what gifts God has given you. **(Use an illustration that shows different gifts being used in different ways.)**

2. What burdens or convictions has God laid on your heart?

That is a key issue. Where is God convicting you? What kind of burden is He laying on your heart? **(Use an illustration that shows someone who had a burden for some area of ministry.)**

3. What opportunities has God placed around you?

Look right around you. What are the opportunities for ministry? How do they combine with the burdens or convictions God has laid on your heart? How do they combine with the gifts God has given you? Every once in awhile I meet somebody who has a burden for an area of ministry for which they have no giftedness. They have to sit down and do a little Bible study together and discover what their real gifts are. Usually, our burdens or convictions, along with our gifting match up the opportunities God places around us.

4. What is the body of Christ affirming in you?

Jeff was young pediatrician who wanted to grow spiritually and get involved spiritually. The time came when the nominating committee said, "Jeff, we would like for you to be an Elder of this congregation. And we would like for you to be a Sabbath School teacher."

Jeff said, "That's impossible. I'm a pediatrician. I have Sabbath morning call. I am on call all by myself. I do not have a partner and the other pediatricians in town do not want to share call with me, so I am on call 24-7. There is no way I can make a commitment to be an Elder and a Sabbath School teacher and be involved."

His pastor responded, "Wait. Let's turn that around. You have got the process reversed."

He said "What do you mean?"

The pastor continued, "I need an answer from you. Is God calling you to be an Elder? Is God calling you to be a Sabbath School teacher?"

He said, "What about my being on call?"

The pastor answered, "That's God's problem. If God calls you to ministry, He equips you and He will open the doors for ministry."

Then Jeff said, "What do you mean?"

The pastor continued, "If God has called you, I challenge you to accept the call to be an Elder and the invitation to be a Sabbath School teacher. Then put it in God's hands to take care of your call schedule."

He did it. A year later he came back to his pastor and said. "You're not going to believe this pastor. I have gotten through a whole year without having a single call on Sabbath morning when I had a Sabbath School class or when I had responsibility as an Elder. I can't believe it! Not only that, last Sabbath afternoon I was in the Neonatal ICU taking care of a very sick preemie and one of the other pediatricians in town was taking care of a sick preemie next to me. He looked over at me and said, "Jeff, my partner and I are tired of taking calls quite as often as we do. We are wondering if you would be willing to share a call with us?"

Now, he had gone to them a year and a half before, asking them to share a call and they said no. Now, they came to him and said, "By the way, we know you like your Sabbaths off and we like our Sundays off, so if you would take more Sunday's than Sabbaths, we will take more Sabbaths than Sundays so you can be off on your Sabbath."

The point I am making is, you are called to ministry. You are gifted, and if you will accept that call and explore and identify those gifts and begin to put them to work, God will open the doors to make it possible for you to be used to His glory and honor in His kingdom. It is really that simple. So, it comes down to some choices. Where do we go from here?

1. Accept your calling to ministry. Do not sit there and tell me, I'm not called. I'm not gifted. There is no place God can use me in the Church. That is simply a lie. If you are a Christian, walking with Christ, you are gifted and you are called.
2. Claim Christ's promise to be with you.
3. Explore and discover your spiritual gifts.

If you want to explore your spiritual gifts, talk with your pastor or one of the leaders in the congregation. Let's begin a process of helping you find your giftedness and your ministry.

Start building a team with others around you. There is no reason why four or five people can't get together and build a ministry where God is calling. Why? Because the future health of this congregation is dependent upon the health of each individual in our walk with God. And our spiritual walk with God is dependent upon our involvement in ministry. You are needed. You are called. You are gifted. Isn't it time that we took up the challenge and discovered our gifts.

You are gifted!

Loving Father, speak to us. Speak to our hearts and help us discover just how much you have given to us in the way gifts and opportunities for ministry. Speak to us as a congregation and help us to give You room to work in our lives and in our Church family. Above all else, help us continue in our walk with You and find the exciting discovery of Jesus working in and through us to touch others around us. We pray and thank you in Jesus' wonderful and precious name. Amen

▷ PURPOSE

The purpose of this eighth and final sermon is to present the invitation to making discipleship as intimacy with God a lifestyle, not just a seven-week experience.

▷ KEY PASSAGES

The key Biblical passages for this sermon are:

- John 1:39, 46
- Mark 1:17
- Mark 3:13-15
- Acts 1:4-5
- Acts 1:8
- Acts 1:8
- Romans 12:1-2
- Colossians 2:6-7

▷ KEY POINTS

The key points to present in this sermon are:

- Discipleship begins with a call to watch Jesus, follow Him, and be with Him.
- Discipleship carries over into all of life.
- We make discipleship work when we offer ourselves to God, allowing Him to transform us and help us live in Christ.
- We need to choose to make discipleship our lifestyle by accepting our calling to be disciples, accepting the reality of the Holy Spirit in us, and living out our lives in and with Jesus.

SERMON OUTLINE 8 · *Ben Maxson* WHY NOT MAKE IT A LIFESTYLE?

THEME

God invites us to a lifestyle of dynamic intimacy with Him. As we experience His love, we will want to grow in our relationship with Him. Discipleship is a lifestyle, not just an occasional encounter.

IT BEGAN WITH A “**CALL**”

- To come and see Him. (John 1:39, 46)
- To follow Him. (Mark 1:17)
- To be with Him. (Mark 3:13-15)

IT CARRIES OVER INTO “**LIFE**”

- Waiting for the Holy Spirit. (Acts 1:4-5)
- Receiving power. (Acts 1:8)
- Becoming His witnesses. (Acts 1:8)

WE CAN MAKE IT “**WORK**”

- Offer ourselves to God. (Romans 12:1)
- Refuse to conform to this world. (Romans 12:2)
- Be transformed by renewing our minds. (Romans 12:2)
- Live in Christ. (Colossians 2:6-7)

LET'S MAKE “**DISCIPLESHIP**” OUR LIFESTYLE

- Accept our calling to be disciples.
- Accept the reality of the Holy Spirit in us.
- Live life in and with Jesus.

Why not make it a lifestyle? It began for twelve, with a call to follow Him. God invites you and me to follow Him. He invites us to a lifestyle of dynamic intimacy with Him. I love that word, intimacy. For most of my life my picture of God was a distant God who wanted me to follow and obey Him. Oh, I loved God, because I knew what He had done for me, but frankly, it was a lot easier to love Jesus because He came and became one of us. I remember the stories of Jesus—His birth, His Miracles, His Ministry.

It was easy to love Jesus. But in the last few years, I have come to embrace the concept of intimacy with God. I love that word. It is a powerful word. It is a dynamic word. Intimacy in a marriage is where the marriage is built and strengthened. The problem with marriages today is much of the intimacy takes place before the marriage. Then after the marriage, intimacy begins to die. We no longer nurture that intimacy with each other. We may have a physical relationship, but we do not really blend the two lives into one. We do not learn what it means to love each other. Intimacy in marriage is the secret of passion in marriage.

Intimacy in the Christian discipleship walk is equally the secret of successful discipleship. I can think of no greater intimacy than the fact that the King of kings, the God of gods, the Lord of lords wants to be friends with you and me. You and I are invited into that incredibly dynamic intimacy with the God of the universe. As we experience His love, we will want to grow in our relationship with Him. It is an automatic response. Ephesians 3 talks about experiencing “the height and depth, length and breadth of the love of God. To know this love that surpasses all knowledge that we might be filled with the fullness of God.”

There, is a picture of intimacy. So close to God that we are filled to His fullness. I love that concept. It is one of my favorite passages in the New Testament. For it promises you and me something that most people in this world never experience—the intimate presence of the almighty God, dwelling in us in His fullness. You see, He does not fill us to our capacity to receive Him. He fills us to His capacity to give Himself to us. He demonstrated that capacity on the cross when He gave Himself completely, fully, to you and me.

Discipleship is a lifestyle. Not just an occasional encounter. It started for the twelve disciples as I said, with a call. A call in John 1:39, to come and see Him. There is where it all begins, with the attraction to see Jesus. And Jesus made the statement, “And if I be lifted up from the earth, I will draw all men unto me.” There is something about the uplifted Christ that is drawing, attracting, and irresistible. You can turn your back on Him, but you cannot ignore Him. If you do not resist, the words in the little book *Steps to Christ* say, you will be drawn to the Master. That is the power of Jesus. When He said to His disciples, “Come and see,” He knew what the response would be. Then He invited them to follow Him. “Come follow me.”

The first step in discipleship is exploring who you are. The second step in discipleship is following after Him. It is what discipleship is all about. You know, there is a difference. In the New Testament world, in the Greek culture, there were many masters and many disciples. The difference was that in the Greek culture, the disciples chose their Master. In the story of Jesus, the Master chose His disciples. Everyone of us has chosen the call to follow Jesus, to be His disciple.

The third and most intimate level in discipleship was to be with Him. Mark 3:14 says, “He chose twelve that they might be with Him and that He might send them out.” Their ministry

is described as the result of their presence with Him. We have explored this during the last seven weeks. What we know today is the result of seven weeks of time with God, and all the previous experience of knowledge of God's Word and walk with God is nothing compared to what He offers to us in the future. We have only begun to taste what Jesus Christ gives to us. It really is about living that life with Him. It must carry over into our lives as it did for the disciples. For when Jesus died, their discipleship walk was only beginning. They would continue by waiting for the Holy Spirit.

Look at Acts 1. As Jesus talked to them here, we see this incredible story. On one occasion while He was eating with them, He gave them this command. "Do not leave Jerusalem but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:4-5). He says, "Wait! Do not run ahead. Wait until the Holy Spirit comes to you."

I often wonder how much of what we do in the Church is done simply in our own strength—running ahead of the Holy Spirit. I want to say something that I have said before in other contexts and in other services. There is not one thing we do in the Church that we can afford to do in our own strength. Everything we do must be done in the context of the Holy Spirit, and it is good for us to wait every morning for the Holy Spirit to come to us. That is why that daily time with God, in His Word, opening our hearts to Him, praying and reading, is so vitally important. That is where we gain our strength for our daily walk with God. How dare we go into the day without that time with God. I do not know about you. The challenges of the last seven weeks have reminded me of how totally dependent I am upon Jesus Christ. There is not one moment of the day that I can afford to live in my own strength. Neither can you. We need to start each day by waiting and claiming the presence of the Holy Spirit.

But, it is not just waiting! He said, "After that you will receive power." Look at verse 8. "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you." I cannot think of any greater thing that we need more than power. Not the kind of power we wrestle for in our current world. Not the kind of power that politicians fight over. We have heard a lot about the current issues in the political world. I am talking about the power of God in our lives. The power of the Holy Spirit. The power to change our days; the power to transform our relationships; the power to change our lifestyle; comes only from the presence of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "When you receive the Holy Spirit, you will receive power." Then He said, "And you will be my witnesses. First in Jerusalem, then Judea, then Samaria, then the uttermost parts of the world." When your life is transformed by the living presence of God, you cannot keep it quiet.

People around us will be asking questions about the Lord we know. The simple fact is we are witnesses to our discipleship walk with God. Let me rephrase that. Our witness tells us and others where our discipleship walk is. You cannot help but witness. You will witness. Everyone of us witness every day. The question is—to what do we witness? As we have a dynamic walk with God, our witness transforms and begins to impact the world around us.

One hundred and twenty believers left the upper room after the day of Pentecost and went out. In a generation, the entire world was turned upside down. The message of Jesus Christ went to the entire, then known world. In fact, it went beyond that because of the life of the disciple Thomas, the doubter—the one who was always asking questions.

Thomas went as far as India. He was killed there because of his witness. There are Christians in India today that date their understanding of Jesus back to the witness of the disciple, Thomas. There was no part of the world that was not impacted by the presence of Christ. Yet, as the years have gone by, that impact has diminished. The Christian Church has lost its power. It has lost its relevance to the world around us. The only way we will regain it is through the discipleship walk with Jesus Christ. It must carry over into our lives. Then we can make it work. We really can! Yes, it is all about God, more than about us. There is yet a part that we must play.

There are four key points we need to look at. Let's start with Romans 12:1 and 2. This is another of my favorite passages in the entire New Testament. "Therefore I urge you brothers, in view of God's mercy to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God. This is your spiritual act of worship." Offer ourselves to God. That is where we should start every day. Offer ourselves as a living sacrifice to be used by God to His glory, and His honor every day.

We also need to refuse to conform to this world. Look at verse two. "Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind and you will be able to test and approve what God's will is." His good, pleasing, and perfect will. "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind."

This is perhaps the greatest challenge you and I face in daily living. For the natural process is for us to become more and more like the world around us. There is one thing that has troubled me over the last few years as I have watched my Church and the Christian Church in general—the drift into secularism and humanism. We have drifted constantly to become and more and more like the world around us. The question I hear over and over again is, "What's wrong with this? Everybody else is doing it? It is really not that bad." The question of the Christian is something radically different—not how close to the world can I walk and live, but how close to Jesus can I walk and live?

You cannot resist the world by saying, "I do not like this, I do not like that," because your likes will be shaped by what you watch and what you see—what you hear, and what you live. The only way that you can reject the world and not be conformed by it, is to be conformed to Jesus Christ. ***It is not about resisting the world, it is about embracing Christ.*** The question is not, "What from the world do I want to accept or reject? But, how close to Jesus can I live?" It is about focus. It is about direction. What we celebrate today in the communion service ought to challenge us regularly, because it takes us back to where Jesus' focus was.

First, His focus was on His service for God. Second, would be on His service for others. It was never on Himself. This is where our focus as disciples has to be. First, on God, embracing Him. Offering ourselves to Him, then serving others around us. When we focus this way, our lives will be transformed by His presence in such a way that we will be able to be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Something has to take place between our two ears. Not just between the ears. We have to cover or close what I call the fifteen inch gap. The gap between the head and the heart!

Christian discipleship is not about a lifestyle of doctrines or practices. It is about a life-style of relationship with Jesus Christ. You have to possess the knowledge, but you also must have the relationship. If there is one thing of which this service reminds us is that Jesus was about

relationship. It was about how He reached out to love us, and by participating in this service we respond as we reach out to love Him.

Finally, it means living in Christ. One of the challenging verses in all of the New Testament is the second chapter of Colossians, verses 6 and 7. The Apostle Paul presents the way of making it a lifestyle. “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord” Let me ask you a question. How did you receive Christ as Lord? By faith? By trusting in Him and believing in Him? “So, then, just as you receive Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him. Strengthened in faith as you were taught and overflowing with thankfulness.”

That is what discipleship is all about. Continuing to live in Him. Rooted and built up in Him. It starts with a daily time with God, but it carries over in every area of life. So, I ask you today, why not make it a lifestyle? Let’s decide together to make discipleship our lifestyle. Let’s accept our calling to be disciples. Not occasional Christians. Not “head” Christians. Not book Christians, but heart Christians who are willing to accept the lifestyle of discipleship—to walk every day with Jesus in every aspect of life.” Let’s accept the reality of the Holy Spirit in us. He has come. You have sensed Him during these last seven weeks as you have studied His Word. As you have read God’s Word and have explored Steps to Discipleship—Accepting Jesus Christ as Savior. Accepting Him as Lord. Accepting Him as dwelling within you by faith. Beginning to share with others what Christ has done for you in the ministry of reconciliation, recognizing who we are as part of the body of Christ, where discipleship is not an isolationist direction or approach, but a corporate fellowship. Beginning to explore our spiritual gifts and making a commitment to ministry. You see, discipleship is about active life in Jesus Christ and in His body. We accept by faith the presence of the Holy Spirit in us, and we live our life in and with Jesus. That is what this service is all about. We are going to separate in just a moment to the foot washing and return here for the emblems of the bread and the wine.

As we do this, let’s remember our calling to be disciples. To make this the lifestyle. Let this foot washing, and this service today be a time of rededication and accepting His invitation to walk with Him from this day forward. Day-in and day-out, let us choose the lifestyle of walking with Jesus Christ.

Let’s pray:

Loving Father, as we go to wash one another’s feet, remind us that it was You who first washed the feet of Your disciples. That symbolism—You were cleansing them as You have cleansed us. As we take part in this service and then in the bread and the wine, we celebrate what You did almost two thousand years ago. We celebrate what You did when you called us disciples to first know and walk with You. We celebrate what You have done during the last seven weeks, and we celebrate what You do today. Let Jesus be real in our lives, we pray in Jesus name. Amen.

▷ INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the **Steps to Discipleship Small Group Leader's Guide**. You are a vital part of the success and impact of program. The small group process will greatly contribute to the spiritual growth of your group members as they work through these next seven weeks. Please join us in praying that God will use you and your group to help each member deepen his or her walk with God. Thank you for being an important part of this exciting journey together.

▷ PURPOSE

This **Leader's Guide** is designed to help you as a small group leader or discussion coordinator to guide your group into deeper study of the topic and decision for the week. This topic is first presented in the Sabbath sermon, and then reviewed and expanded in the daily study guide for each participant.

This **Leader's Guide** will help you in your work with your group in several ways:

First, it will provide you a framework for the entire program so that you can understand where we are going throughout the seven weeks.

Second, this **Guide** will identify objectives for each week's study and discussion.

Finally, this material will give you a suggested process for each week's group meeting. Please use your judgment in adapting this process to meet the needs of your group. The most important objective is to help the members of your group connect with God and grow deeper in their relationship with Him as disciples.

▷ STEPS TO DISCIPLESHIP

The **Steps to Discipleship** material is designed to help individuals grow in their relationship with God and in an intentional discipleship process. It also invites individuals into discipleship as a lifestyle.

There are eight Sabbaths and seven weeks in the overall strategy. Participants have a personal **Study Guide** which guides them through daily study in Scripture, as well as time in reflection and prayer.

▷ PRINCIPLES

There are four foundational principles on which the **Steps to Discipleship** strategy is built. Two of these principles are biblical:

- God promised that we would find Him when we search for Him with all our hearts. (Jeremiah 29:13)
- Jesus promised that we would be drawn to the uplifted Christ. (John 12:32)

There are also two mental or psychological principles:

- People resist making a long-term commitment, but are willing to make a short-term one.
- If we do something daily for six to seven weeks, we develop a habit, and we want to build a habit of regular devotional time with God.

▷ OBJECTIVES

There are three key objectives for the **Steps to Discipleship** program:

- To invite individuals into an intentional discipleship process of daily time with God in prayer and Bible study.
- To move people through a set of sequential discipleship decisions.
- To lead individuals to discipleship as a lifestyle.

▷ SEQUENTIAL DECISIONS

The study material invites individuals to make a series of eight sequential decisions. It will help you as a group leader to keep these decisions in mind as you facilitate the discussion each week.

1. To try intentionally try God for seven weeks by giving Him 30-45 minutes a day in planned Bible study and prayer
2. To accept or affirm Jesus Christ as Savior and to accept the assurance of salvation based on grace and the gift of God.
3. To accept Jesus as Lord of our lives, surrendering control to Him of every area of life.
4. To accept the reality of Jesus Christ dwelling within us as the power for the daily Christian life.
5. To accept the invitation to the ministry of sharing with others what Jesus has done for us.
6. To accept being and living as part of the Church as the Body of Christ, and to explore what it means to be part of this Body.
7. To accept a personal ministry based on God's calling and the spiritual gifts He gives us.
8. To choose discipleship as a daily and long term lifestyle.

▷ OBJECTIVES FOR WEEK

The objectives for this week's study are:

1. To begin an intentional search for a deeper relationship with God.
2. To explore how God sees us.
3. To explore the depths of God's love for us.
4. To claim the promise that we will find God when we search for Him.

▷ OPENING PRAYER

You will want to be sure to open the group study and discussion session with a prayer. You may want to ask one of the group members to have the opening prayer. In order to avoid embarrassment, it would be good to plan ahead and ask the person if he or she is willing to lead the group in prayer.

▷ SHARING & PRAYER

Invite the group members to spend a few minutes in sharing with each other the highlights of the week, and any prayer requests they might have. Then spend a few minutes praying for those requests. This can be done as an entire group, or by teaming up in two's or three's.

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

Review the memory verses for this week, and discuss the meaning of each verse. Invite the members to share which of the verses spoke most directly to them, and how. The two verses for this week are:

Jeremiah 31:3 (NIV) — “The Lord appeared to us in the past, saying: *“I have loved you with an everlasting love; I have drawn you with loving-kindness.”*”

Jeremiah 31:3 (KJV) — “The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, *“Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”*”

Psalms 34:8 (NIV)—“Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him.”

Psalms 34:8 (KJV)—“O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.”

Then discuss any possible application to our lives as individuals and as a church family. Look especially for points that fit in with the objectives for this week's study.

▷ DISCUSSION

Now we want to explore the area of study for the week—seeking God. Help the group clarify and remember the purpose of this week’s study. The following questions will help you in this discussion. Remember, you do not have to complete all the questions below if your time does not allow. What is important is that the group members process what they have been learning in their daily study, and explore how to apply these things to their lives. You may choose from any or all of these questions.

1. Read Jeremiah 29:11-13 — What does this passage tell us about how God looks at us? How do you think God sees us?
2. How does the life and death of Jesus Christ draw us to God? (See John 12:20-33)
3. Read Psalm 63:1. In what ways can we identify our own thirst for God? How does this thirst show up in our daily lives?
4. Time alone with God was important for Jesus. How is that time important for us, and what can we do to help make that time meaningful for us?
5. Read Matthew 1:21-23. Which of these two names for Jesus is most meaningful to you and why?
6. Share with the group one or two things you would like to accomplish in your journey with God during the next week.

▷ CLOSING PRAYER

Encourage the group members to follow through on their commitment of daily time with God. Then close your group session with prayer.

▷ OBJECTIVES FOR WEEK

The objectives for this week's study are:

1. To face our need for salvation.
2. To understand that salvation is a gift of grace.
3. To accept and/or affirm the gift of salvation.
4. To believe and rejoice in salvation.
5. To accept and explore our new life in Christ.

▷ OPENING PRAYER

Once again you will want to open the group study and discussion session with prayer. You may want to ask one of the group members to have the opening prayer. In order to avoid embarrassment, it would be good to plan ahead and ask the person if he or she is willing to lead the group in prayer.

▷ SHARING & PRAYER

Invite the group members to spend a few minutes in sharing with each other the highlights of the week, and any prayer requests they might have. Then spend a few minutes praying for those requests. This can be done as an entire group, or by teaming up in two's or three's.

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

Review the memory verses for this week, and discuss the meaning of each verse. Invite the members to share which of the verses spoke most directly to them, and how. The two verses for this week are:

Ephesians 2:8-9 (NIV)—“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 (KJV)—“For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

1 John 5:13 (NIV)—“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

1 John 5:13 (KJV)—“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life . . .”

Then discuss any possible application to our lives as individuals and as a church family. Look especially for points that fit in with the objectives for this week's study.

▷ DISCUSSION

Take time to explore the subject of salvation and assurance in Christ. This is the focus of this week's study. Help the group clarify and remember the purpose of this week's study. The following questions will help you in this discussion. Remember, you do not have to complete all the questions below if your time does not allow. What is important is that the group members process what they have been learning in their daily study, and explore how to apply these things to their lives. You may choose from any or all of these questions.

1. Read Ephesians 2:4-9 — What does this passage tell us about salvation and how God sees us?
2. What does the story of Zacchaeus in Luke 19:1-10 tell us about how Jesus dealt with sinners?
3. Read Psalm 32:1-8. What does this passage tell us about God's forgiveness?
4. Read 1 John 1:5-9 and 2:12. What is the basis or foundation for God's forgiveness?
5. Discuss how forgiveness changes our lives.
6. In light of John 3:1-17 and 1 John 5:11-13, what level of assurance of salvation can be ours? What impact can this assurance have on how we live?
7. Share with the group one or two things you would like to accomplish in your journey with God during the next week.

▷ CLOSING PRAYER

Encourage the group members to follow through on their commitment of daily time with God. Then close your group session with prayer.

WEEK 3 • SUGGESTED GROUP PROCESS IT'S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

▷ OBJECTIVES FOR WEEK

The objectives for this week's study are:

1. To understand the lordship of Jesus Christ.
2. To choose to accept His lordship.
3. To begin the process of integrating His lordship into the way we live our daily lives.

▷ OPENING PRAYER

Once again you will want to open the group study and discussion session with prayer. You may want to ask one of the group members to have the opening prayer. In order to avoid embarrassment, it would be good to plan ahead and ask the person if he or she is willing to lead the group in prayer.

▷ SHARING & PRAYER

Invite the group members to spend a few minutes in sharing with each other the highlights of the week, and any prayer requests they might have. Then spend a few minutes praying for those requests. This can be done as an entire group, or by teaming up in two's or three's.

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

Review the memory verses for the last seven days, and discuss the meaning of each verse. Invite the members to share which of the verses spoke most directly to them, and how. The two verses for this week's group study are:

1 John 5:13 (NIV)—“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life.”

1 John 5:13 (KJV)—“These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life ...”

Proverbs 3:5-6 (NIV)—“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight.”

Proverbs 3:5-6 (KJV)—“Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths.”

Discuss any possible application to our lives as individuals and as a church family. Look especially for points that fit in with the objectives for this week's study.

WEEK 3 • SUGGESTED GROUP PROCESS IT'S ALL ABOUT SURRENDER

▷ DISCUSSION

Take time to explore the subject of Jesus as Lord. Help the group explore and clarify the purpose of this week's study. The following questions are designed to help you in this discussion. Remember, you do not have to complete all the questions below if your time does not allow. What is important is that the group members process what they have been learning in their daily study, and explore how to apply these things to their lives. You may choose from any or all of these questions.

1. Read John 1:1-14—How does Christ's role as Creator give Him the right to be Lord of our lives? What are the implications of His power as Creator? How can He make a difference in our lives?
2. Read John 13:1-17—How does the picture of Jesus the Lord as servant impact on how we should think and act as His disciples?
3. Read Philippians 4:10-19—What confidence can be ours with Jesus as Lord, and why?
4. Read John 20:24-29—What is the difference between doubt and wanting to experience Jesus first-hand?
5. Read Luke 6:1-10—What is the relationship between the Sabbath and Jesus as Creator, Redeemer, and Sanctifier? How does this make Him Lord of the Sabbath and what are the implications for our daily lives?
6. Read and discuss Romans 13:11-14—How can we clothe ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ?

▷ CLOSING PRAYER

Once again, encourage the group members to follow through on their commitment of daily time with God. Then close your group session with prayer.

▷ OBJECTIVES FOR WEEK

The objectives for this week's study and discussion are:

1. To understand the biblical reality that Christ wants to dwell in us.
2. To understand how to accept Jesus as living within us.
3. To explore the implications of an intimate union with God.

▷ OPENING PRAYER

Once again you will want to open the group study and discussion session with prayer. You may want to ask one of the group members to have the opening prayer. In order to avoid embarrassment, it would be good to plan ahead and ask the person if he or she is willing to lead the group in prayer.

▷ SHARING & PRAYER

Invite the group members to spend a few minutes in sharing with each other the highlights of the week, and any prayer requests they might have. Then spend a few minutes praying for those requests. This can be done as an entire group, or by teaming up in two's or three's.

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

Review the memory verses for the last seven days, and discuss the meaning of each verse. Invite the members to share which of the verses spoke most directly to them, and how. The two verses for this week's group study are:

Ezekiel 36:26-27 (NIV)—“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws.”

Ezekiel 36:26-27 (KJV)—“A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and ye shall keep my judgments, and do them.”

2 Peter 1:3-4 (NIV)—“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

2 Peter 1:3-4 (KJV)—“According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.”

▷ DISCUSSION

Our focus for discussion this week is the reality of the indwelling Christ. Help the group explore and clarify the purpose of this week's study. The following questions are designed to help you in this discussion. Remember, you do not have to complete all the questions below if your time does not allow. What is important is that the group members process what they have been learning in their daily study, and explore how to apply these things to their lives. You may choose from any or all of these questions.

1. Reflect on the story of Mary and Martha in Luke 10:38-41. Who are we most like? How does this impact on our spiritual journey?
2. Read John 14:16-21. What are the key elements of this promise? What does verse 20 tell us about intimacy with God?
3. Read Isaiah 43:1-2. Explore what this promise can mean for us. Does it mean that we will never have problems or disasters? What else could this mean for us?
4. Read and reflect on 2 Peter 1:3-4. What are the implications of this promise?
5. Read Ephesians 2:4-10. What do these verses tell us about obedience or "good works?"
6. Read Ephesians 3:16-21. What part of this passage speaks to you the most and why?

▷ CLOSING PRAYER

Once again, encourage the group members to follow through on their commitment of daily time with God. Then close your group session with prayer.

▷ OBJECTIVES FOR WEEK

The objectives for this week's study are:

1. To understand the power of witnessing.
2. To recognize that we are each called to the ministry of sharing Jesus with others.
3. To commit ourselves to share when and when God provides the opportunity.
4. To prayerfully identify those God brings to us to learn about Jesus.

▷ OPENING PRAYER

Once again you will want to open the group study and discussion session with prayer. You may want to ask one of the group members to have the opening prayer. In order to avoid embarrassment, it would be good to plan ahead and ask the person if he or she is willing to lead the group in prayer.

▷ SHARING & PRAYER

Invite the group members to spend a few minutes in sharing with each other the highlights of the week, and any prayer requests they might have. Then spend a few minutes praying for those requests. This can be done as an entire group, or by teaming up in two's or three's.

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

Review the memory verses for the last seven days, and discuss the meaning of each verse. Invite the members to share which of the verses spoke most directly to them, and how. The two verses for this period are:

2 Peter 1:3-4 (NIV)—“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.”

2 Corinthians 5:18-19 (NIV)—“All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation.”

Then discuss any possible application to our lives as individuals and as a church family. Look especially for points that fit in with the objectives for this week's study.

▷ DISCUSSION

Our focus for discussion this week is on our ministry as disciples who have experienced salvation. Christ invites us to share the good news with those around us. Help the group explore and clarify the purpose of this week's study. The following questions are designed to help you in this discussion. Remember, you do not have to complete all the questions below if your time does not allow. What is important is that the group members process what they have been learning in their daily study, and explore how to apply these things to their lives. You may choose from any or all of these questions.

1. Reflect on Luke 10:1-4—Who has the responsibility for providing workers for the spiritual harvest?
2. Reflect on the story of the first disciples in John 1:35-50—What was the power of Andrew's and Philip's invitation? How was this invitation better than some argument?
3. Read 1 Peter 3:15-16. What is the "reason for our hope?"
4. Read 2 Corinthians 5:14-21. What do the phrases "ministry of reconciliation" and "ministry of reconciliation" mean to you?
5. Read 1 Corinthians 9:16-23. What key principles from this passage can help shape our ministries?

▷ CLOSING PRAYER

Once again, encourage the group members to follow through on their commitment of daily time with God. Then close your group session with prayer.

▷ OBJECTIVES FOR WEEK

The objectives for this week's study are:

1. To explore what it means to be the Church—the Body of Christ.
2. To discover our new identity as members of the Body of Christ.
3. To identify biblical ways of functioning as the Church.

▷ OPENING PRAYER

Once again you will want to open the group study and discussion session with prayer. You may want to ask one of the group members to have the opening prayer. In order to avoid embarrassment, it would be good to plan ahead and ask the person if he or she is willing to lead the group in prayer.

▷ SHARING & PRAYER

Invite the group members to spend a few minutes in sharing with each other the highlights of the week, and any prayer requests they might have. Then spend a few minutes praying for those requests. This can be done as an entire group, or by teaming up in two's or three's.

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

Review the memory verses for the last seven days, and discuss the meaning of each verse. Invite the members to share which of the verses spoke most directly to them, and how. The two verses for this period are:

1 Peter 3:15 (NIV)—“But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect . . .”

1 Corinthians 3:16 (NIV)—“Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you?”

Then discuss any possible application to our lives as individuals and as a church family. Look especially for points that fit in with the objectives for this week's study.

▷ DISCUSSION

Our focus for discussion this week is on being the Church of God as the Body of Christ. This is our new identity in Christ, and it can have a powerful impact on how we live. Help your group explore and clarify the purpose of this week's study. The following questions are designed to help you in this discussion. Remember, you do not have to complete all the questions below if your time does not allow. What is important is that the group members process what they have been learning in their daily study, and explore how to apply these things to their lives. You may choose from any or all of these questions.

1. Reflect on 1 Corinthians 3:9, 16-17—What are the implications of being God's temple as a church?
2. Reflect on 1 Corinthians 12:12-27—How can we put these principles to work in how we live as God's Church?
3. Read Ephesians 4:11-16. What points from this passage inspire you with God's vision for His Church?
4. Read Romans 12:9-18. What are the key points in this passage about relationships within God's Church?
5. Read Mark 10:35-44. What key principles from this passage can help shape our relationships?

▷ CLOSING PRAYER

Once again, encourage the group members to follow through on their commitment of daily time with God. Then close your group session with prayer.

WEEK 7 • SUGGESTED GROUP PROCESS WHY NOT MAKE IT A LIFESTYLE?

▷ OBJECTIVES FOR WEEK

The objectives for this week's study are:

1. To understand that each one of us is a minister.
2. To understand the concept of spiritual gifts.
3. To accept our calling to ministry.
4. To begin exploring our calling to ministry and identifying our spiritual gifts for ministry.

▷ OPENING PRAYER

Once again you will want to open the group study and discussion session with prayer. You may want to ask one of the group members to have the opening prayer. In order to avoid embarrassment, it would be good to plan ahead and ask the person if he or she is willing to lead the group in prayer.

▷ SHARING & PRAYER

Invite the group members to spend a few minutes in sharing with each other the highlights of the week, and any prayer requests they might have. Then spend a few minutes praying for those requests. This can be done as an entire group, or by teaming up in two's or three's.

▷ MEMORY VERSE REVIEW

Review the memory verses for the last seven days, and discuss the meaning of each verse. Invite the members to share which of the verses spoke most directly to them, and how. The two verses for this period are:

Galatians 6:1-2 (NIV)—“Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.”

1 Peter 2:9 (NIV)—“But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.”

Then discuss any possible application to our lives as individuals and as a church family. Look especially for points that fit in with the objectives for this week's study.

WEEK 7 • SUGGESTED GROUP PROCESS WHY NOT MAKE IT A LIFESTYLE?

▷ DISCUSSION

Our focus for discussion this week is on the fact that God calls each of us to ministry. He also equips each of us for ministry. Help your group explore and clarify the purpose of this week's study. The following questions are designed to help you in this discussion. Remember, you do not have to complete all the questions below if your time does not allow. What is important is that the group members process what they have been learning in their daily study, and explore how to apply these things to their lives. You may choose from any or all of these questions.

1. Reflect on 1 Peter 2:4-10. What does it mean to be part of a priesthood? In what way are we priests?
2. Reflect on John 14:1-14. How can we do "greater things" than Jesus did during His ministry?
3. Read 1 Corinthians 12. What can we learn from this chapter about our spiritual gifts?
4. Read Ephesians 4:7-16. What do these verses tell us about the pastor's role in comparison with the role of each member?
5. Reflect on Matthew 28:16-20. What can we learn from these verses about our ministries?
6. Reflect on Ephesians 3:14-21. What does it mean to comprehend God's love? What does it mean to be filled to "the fullness of God?"

▷ CLOSING PRAYER

Once again, encourage the group members to follow through on their commitment of daily time with God. Then close your group session with prayer.