

# *The Means of Grace*

**A Study of the Secondary Resources that God Uses to  
Facilitate the Building and Sanctifying of Our Faith.**

**Hillsdale Free Methodist Church  
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## **The Means of Grace Lessons:**

- 1- Introduction
- 2- Why do we pursue the “*Means of Grace*”?
- 3- Prayer
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- 5- Preaching and Worship
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## Introduction:

### What is “*The Means of Grace*”?

The **Means of Grace** in Christian theology are those things (the *means*) through which God gives grace. Just what this grace entails is interpreted in various ways: generally speaking, some see it as God blessing humankind so as to sustain and empower the Christian life; others see it as forgiveness, life, and salvation.

### Methodist Theology:

In Methodism, the *means of grace* are ways in which God works invisibly in disciples, quickening, strengthening and confirming faith. So, believers use them to open their hearts and lives to God's work in them.

According to John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, the *means of grace* can be divided into two broad categories, with individual and communal components:

- Works of Piety, such as: Individual practice, prayer, fasting, searching the Scriptures, healthy living, communal practices, holy communion, Baptism, Christian Conferencing (or "community") and works of mercy, such as: Service focused toward individual needs, good works, visiting the sick, visiting the imprisoned, feeding & clothing those in need, earning, saving, & giving all one can service focused toward communal/societal needs, the seeking of Justice; Opposition to Slavery.
- Careful attention to the *means of grace* are, for Methodists, important in the process of sanctification as one is moved on toward Christian Perfection through the work of the Holy Spirit [From Wikipedia.com “Means of grace”](#).

John Wesley warned about people who despised means of grace because in church history so many had followed the outward signs only without a heart renewed by the Holy Spirit. Wesley defines means of grace: “By ‘means of grace’ I understand outward signs, words, or actions, ordained of God, and appointed for this end, to be the ordinary channels whereby he might convey to men, preventing, justifying, or sanctifying grace.” Wesley held to the following as “means of grace”: “The chief of these means are prayer, whether in secret or with the great congregation; searching the Scriptures; (which implies reading, hearing, and meditating thereon;) and receiving the Lord’s supper, eating bread and drinking wine in remembrance of Him: And these we believe to be ordained of God, as the ordinary channels of conveying his grace to the souls of men.”

For those who think “means of grace” are only the domain of Lutheran and Reformed theology, I suggest reading Wesley’s sermon. His understanding of sinners groaning under the weight of sin and alarmed by the wrath of God shows a far greater understanding of the gospel than is common today. He suggests to such ones that though God may providentially work in various ways, they should avail themselves of the means of grace: “And in the mean time, the sure and general rule for all who groan for the salvation of God is this, — whenever opportunity serves, use all the means which God has ordained; for who knows in which God will meet thee with the grace that bringeth salvation?” Wesley certainly did not hold to the “say this little prayer after me” version of salvation. ([www.cicministry.org](http://www.cicministry.org))

## Quotes to Note on the “*Means of Grace*”:

“One thing essential to growth in grace is *diligence in the use of private means of grace*. By these I understand such means as a man must use by himself alone, and no one can use for him. I include under this head private prayer, private reading of the Scriptures, and private meditation and self-examination. The man who does not take pains about these three things must never expect to grow.” (J. C. Ryle, *Holiness*, 89)

The means of grace (prayer, sacraments, fasting, worship, praise, etc.) ARE NOT CAUSAL to our receiving the “sense” from God to be spiritually discerning. WHY? Because there is a trap here that WE are the reason for our spirituality. It is a gift from God. Not from ourselves.

(Jonathan) EDWARDS says: your sanctification is a work of God. There are no steps to do this. God just does it. Means are not causal, but they are necessary. God normally uses these means to do His work. BUT THEY ARE NOT CAUSAL!

Most people are trying to sanctify themselves by means of grace. In reality, we use the means of grace and allow God to do His work. God comes when He comes. Our task is to expose ourselves to the means of grace and WAIT! There is an element of mystery of this in allowing God to be God. We (in the Western nations) like a cause and effect religion. Do this and this will happen. God says no! He does His work when He wants. He is like the wind blowing. We do our job and wait for the wind to blow. Usually the light comes when we are using the means. Usually the taste of the honey comes to us when we are using the means of grace. But we must wait on God. Let God be God.

We do what we can and leave it to God. He is not safe but He is good. We must trust God.

Edwards was GOD-CENTERED. No one comes to me unless the Father draws him. ALSO, if anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink.

In other words, we are like a ship. We hoist the sails (the means of grace) and wait for God to send the wind. We don’t hoist the sail, and blow in them.

God always worked through means. Whether he sent an earthquake or a shortage of available land, God was still acting to remind humans of their spiritual needs. Through such forces God provided the soil for revival. God, through the Holy Spirit, also provided the means of grace, such as preaching the Word and the ordinances of the church, as means of tending the spiritual vineyard, as one biblical image put it. (Marsden, *Edwards*, 152)

“Whatever pretenses men make of thankfulness for the Word of God, however they speak of it as a privilege to have light and the means of grace, if they do not yield obedience to the light and conform themselves to the commands of it, they are practically unthankful and do in effect cast it behind their backs (Nehemiah 9:26). (Roberts, *Sanctify the Congregation*, 127)

A single sin, however secret, when indulged, diffuses its corrupting influence over the whole soul; it depraves the conscience; it alienates from God; it strengthens all other principles of evil, while it destroys the efficacy of the means of grace and the disposition to use them. It is no less true of any community, that any one tolerated evil deteriorates its whole moral sense. (Charles Hodge, *Commentary on the First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 86)

## Why do we pursue the means of Grace?:

- I. By looking at the following verses, what does the Bible say is the spiritual status of natural man? John 3:16-18

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Romans 3:9-18 \_\_\_\_\_

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Ephesians 2:1-10 \_\_\_\_\_

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- II. In Matthew 13:1-23, Jesus tells the parable of the four soils. In what ways is this parable applicable to our study of the “*Means of Grace*”?:

A. What kinds of soils does Jesus point out here? \_\_\_\_\_

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B. What makes them effective or ineffective for the Kingdom of God? \_\_\_\_\_

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C. What can we do to allow the soil in our lives to become more useful for the Kingdom of God? \_\_\_\_\_

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D. How might the “*Means of Grace*” be useful for that end? \_\_\_\_\_

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**III.** The early Christian church was explosive in its growth, passionate in its love for Christ, devoted to the Gospel and sacrificial in its love. Many people look to Acts 2:42-47 as being an explanation as to why the early church enjoyed this level of maturity, love, devotion and passion. Read Acts 2:42-47. What do you see here? What are the “*Means of Grace*” the early church employed? Thoughts?! \_\_\_\_\_

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**IV.** Read Ephesians 4:1-16. What direction or counsel does the Apostle Paul give the church in Ephesus to allow them to become mature, strong, and more closely conformed into the image of Christ? What are the “*Means of Grace*” that Paul asks them to employ? Thoughts!? \_\_\_\_\_

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**V.** The Apostle Paul tells the church in Rome what needs to take place in order for them to be able . . . “*to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will*” (Rom 12:1-2). What were those things that the Apostle Paul asks the church in Rome to do? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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**VI.** Finally, in Colossians 3:1-17 the Apostle Paul tells us to set our hearts on things above, not on earthly things. How does he say to do this? Thoughts!? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Prayer as a Means of Grace:

The first spiritual discipline that I would like to share with you is prayer. Talking and listening to God. Missionary William Carey says, “Prayer —secret, fervent, believing prayer— lies at the root of all personal godliness.” (William Carey as quoted in E. M. Bounds; **Power Through Prayer**, p. 23)

When Jesus’s disciples asked him to teach them to pray, Jesus offered them The Lord’s Prayer.

### Read Matthew 6:5-15 as well as Luke 11:1-13

1- What is Jesus trying to teach here in the Lord’s Prayer? \_\_\_\_\_

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2- Why did Jesus offer to teach the disciples the Lord’s prayer? \_\_\_\_\_

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3- What differences do you see between Matthew and Luke’s versions of the Lord’s prayer? Why do you think this is so? \_\_\_\_\_

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4- What kinds of things is our Lord instructing us to pray for? Does Jesus’ list conform or conflict with our typical items for which we pray? \_\_\_\_\_

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We are told to: pray without ceasing (1 Thessalonians 5:17), come before the throne of God and pray boldly (Hebrews 4:16), and yet humbly (Luke 18:9-14), pray privately or in secret (Matthew 6:6), without vain repetition (Matthew 6:7), but to remain persistent (Matthew 7:7; Luke 18:1-8), pray with faith and not be double-minded (James 1:5-7), confess our sins (1 John 1:9), pray for forgiveness (Matthew 6:12), pray for our daily needs (Matthew 6:11), guidance (Matthew 6:13), and for the Holy Spirit (John 14:16). We are encouraged to pray for our leaders (1 Tim 2:1-2), our enemies and those who mistreat us (Matthew 5:44), fellow Christians (1 Thessalonians 5:25), our families (1 Sam 1:27), and for the effectiveness of the Gospel in the world (2 Thessalonians 3:1). This is only a partial list. But, it will give you an idea of what God wants us to pray for.

- 5- What does it mean to pray without ceasing? \_\_\_\_\_  
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- 6- What does it mean to pray boldly yet humbly? \_\_\_\_\_  
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- 7- Why are we encouraged to pray in private? \_\_\_\_\_  
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- 8- Why is mindless repetition discouraged? \_\_\_\_\_  
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- 9- How do we pray persistently and yet not resorting to mindless repetition? \_\_\_\_\_  
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- 10- What does James mean by offering a “double-minded” prayer? \_\_\_\_\_  
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- 11- Why is it necessary to pray for forgiveness when God has already assured us that ALL of our sins, past, present and future, have already been covered by the blood of Christ? \_\_\_\_\_  
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- 12- By looking at this partial list of what God wants us to pray for, what do you think is the attitude or posture we need to have when we come to God in prayer? \_\_\_\_\_  
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- 13- Can you think of anything for which one should NOT pray? Why? \_\_\_\_\_  
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- 14- The REAL Lord’s prayer is in John 17:1-26. Read this text. What is the context of Jesus’



prayer here in John 17? \_\_\_\_\_

15- For what does Jesus pray? What is the reason He makes these intercessions? \_\_\_\_\_

16- What strikes you about the longest recorded prayer of Jesus we have? \_\_\_\_\_

17- Puritan William Bridge makes this comment about meditation's place in prayer: "As it is sister of reading, so it is the mother of prayer. Though a man's heart be much indisposed to prayer, yet, if he can but fall into meditation of God, and the things of God, his heart will soon come off to prayer. . . Begin with reading or hearing. Go on with meditation; end with prayer. . . . Reading without meditation is unfruitful; meditation without reading is hurtful; to meditate and to read without prayer upon both is without blessing." **The Works of the Reverend William Bridge**; Vol 3, pg 132 & 154. Why is meditation such a vital discipline for both reading Scripture and prayer? Also, what role does Scripture reading play in prayer as a means of grace? \_\_\_\_\_

18- Soren Kierkegaard states, "A man prayed, and at first he thought that prayer was talking. But he became more and more quiet until in the end he realized that prayer is listening." **Christian Discourses**, p. 324. Thoughts.

Some of the really great prayers of the Bible are found in Matthew 26 (Jesus' prayer in Gethsemane), 1 Samuel 1:10 (Hannah), 2 Samuel 7:18-29 (David), Ezra 9:5-15 (Ezra), Isaiah 37:15-20 (Hezekiah), Daniel 9:4-19 (Daniel). I would commend you to study these and notice the attitude and heart of the one offering the prayer. It is really quite instructive.

19- If God is sovereign, omniscient, omnipotent, omnipresent and all wise, why in the world do we have to pray? What can God ever learn from us? \_\_\_\_\_

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20- What encouragement do we get from the Scriptures about the effectiveness of our prayers in facilitating positive change in the world and in our own lives and the lives of our loved ones? (see: Genesis 18; Exodus 32; 2 Samuel 12:22-23; 1 Kings 21:28-29; 2 Kings 22:18-20; 2 Chronicles 12:1-12; Isaiah 38; Jeremiah 18:1-12; Ezekiel 22; Amos 7; Matthew 15:21-28).

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21- Read Matthew 7:7-8. What is Jesus saying here? What encouragement can we glean from these verses? \_\_\_\_\_

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22- Read Luke 18:1-8 What is Jesus saying here? What encouragement can we glean from these verses? \_\_\_\_\_

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23- James 4:1-8 says "***We don't have because we don't ask. And when we do ask, we ask with the wrong motives***". What does this mean in regard to our approach to our prayers?

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24- Why don't we pray? Is it because we are afraid that God is not really there and we don't want to be disappointed? Is it because we are afraid God really is there and we don't want to be obligated? Or is it because we don't want to confess our needs? Is it simply we are too lazy?

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25- What steps can we take to become more devoted in our prayer life and thus make it more effective as a means of grace? \_\_\_\_\_

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Whatever our reason, we need to pray. And a huge part of praying to God is listening to His responding to us. That is why I like to include Scripture reading as a vital part of my prayer life. For to pray and then not listen, is to exclude ourselves from the most important aspect of praying. Why would anyone ask Brandon Inge about baseball only to walk away from the conversation after asking the questions? Why would anyone ask Julia Childs about cooking only to walk away from the conversation after asking the questions? Why would anyone ask Pavel Datsyuk about hockey only to walk away from the conversation after asking the questions? So why do we think we are done with our conversations with God once we have made our petitions, asked our questions or sought His counsel. I would encourage you to read God's Word as a regular part of your devotional prayer time.

Finally, one last thought from a guy who knew quite a bit about prayer and a personal relationship with the Living God: John Bunyon. He said, "When thou prayest, rather let thy heart be without words than thy words without heart."

Just something to think (pray) about.



## Fasting as a Means of Grace:

The next Spiritual Discipline that I would like to address, is fasting as a “*Means of Grace*”. This is a discipline that was expected to be a part of the believer’s walk, not only in the First Century, but for the next nineteen centuries following. This practice has fallen away from use in the last 100 years or so. It was great for Fred Adams (FM missionary to the Philippines) to mention the fact that some of the spiritual battles which he faced could only be overcome by the use of fasting. And fasting is one of many tools God can use to hone us and make us sharp and develop spiritual sensitivities, maturity and power.

I know when Fred was here about 18 months ago or so, he gave a very detailed outline of how to fast. The Bible certainly doesn’t express this kind of detail. And I think Fred’s motivation to do such was to allow us to see how to work into a scheduled pattern of more and more serious fasting which allows for our bodies to adjust to the point of being able to engage in a more intense withholding of food for increased spiritual benefit. But, the Bible doesn’t give us very many details at all about how to fast. The Bible basically assumes that everyone who is a believer fasts and knows how to fast (kind of like the Bible doesn’t give us a whole lot of details on praying).

Read the following passages of Scripture. What insights can you glean from them about why we fast, and what attitude we should possess in going into a fast. What can you take with you as you consider fasting as a “Means of Grace” in your life?

READ - Leviticus 16:29-34: What is the setting for this fast? Why do you suppose that God (through Moses) commanded this fast? What attitude is desired? \_\_\_\_\_

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READ - Deuteronomy 9:15-21: What is the setting for this fast? Why do you suppose Moses felt compelled to fast? What attitude did Moses possess in the midst of the fast? \_\_\_\_\_

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READ - 1 Samuel 7:2-6: What is the setting for this fast? Why do you suppose that Samuel called for this fast? What attitude is Samuel trying to promote? \_\_\_\_\_

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READ - 2 Samuel 12:7-17: What is the setting for this fast? Why do you suppose David imposed this fast upon himself? What is David trying to express through this fast? \_\_\_\_\_

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READ - 2 Chronicles 20:1-4: What is the setting for this fast? Why do you suppose Jehoshaphat called for this fast? What is Jehoshaphat trying to accomplish? \_\_\_\_\_

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READ - Ezra 8:21-23: What is the setting for this fast? Why do you suppose Ezra called for this fast? What is Ezra trying to secure? \_\_\_\_\_

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READ - Nehemiah 1:1-11: What is the setting for this fast? Why do you suppose Nehemiah engaged in this fast? What is Nehemiah hoping to accomplish? \_\_\_\_\_

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READ - Daniel 9:3: What is the setting for this fast? Why do you suppose Daniel engaged in this fast? What is he hoping to accomplish? \_\_\_\_\_

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If you have noticed, all of these examples are from the Older Testament. There is actually very little instruction concerning fasting in the New Testament. Outside of one mention by Luke in Acts 13, 14 & 27, there is no further instruction given. Here is what the New Testament instructs us about fasting:

READ - Matthew 6:15-18: What assumptions does Jesus make about those who are listening to His teaching? \_\_\_\_\_

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What warning does Jesus give about how they should engage in their fasting? \_\_\_\_\_

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What result does Jesus imply when one of His disciples engages in earnest, sincere, and biblical fasting? \_\_\_\_\_

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READ - Matthew 9:14-15 (as well as Mk 2:18-20; Lk 5:33-35): What apparently was true of Jesus' disciples at this time? What shift does Jesus say will take place once Jesus is gone?

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Why do you think that ALL of the synoptic Gospels include this teaching of Jesus? What is Jesus saying about Himself, and the life and attitude of His disciples? \_\_\_\_\_

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Basically, the whole idea of fasting is that by it you begin to recognize and express your humility and insignificance and helplessness before God (Exodus 34:28; Leviticus 16:29ff; 23:27-32; Numbers 29:7; Deuteronomy 9:9, 18; Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Samuel 12:16-22; 1 Kings 21:9-29; 2 Chronicles 20:3; Ezra 8:21; Nehemiah 1:4; 9:1; Esther 4:3, 16; 9:31; Psalm 35:13; Jeremiah 36:6-9; Mark 1:13; 2:18; Luke 5:33). It is through fasting you plead for help, assistance, encouragement or salvation in a more intense manner. Also, it is through fasting that God many times brings about increased revelation or spiritual understanding (see Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9, 18; Daniel 9:3).

What must we always remember about God and his Providence and Sovereignty when we fast?

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What must we always remember about the influence of human choices and free will when we fast?

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Prayer and fasting go together (Matthew 17:21; Mark 9:29; Luke 2:37; Acts 9:9; 10:30; 13:2-3; 27:33). Why do you think this is true? \_\_\_\_\_

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Fasting is not a discipline we do to lose weight or to save money, but is a discipline in which we physically go without so that we might focus more intensely and sincerely on the Lord and what He desires to tell us and how He desires to lead us. Therefore, to fast without taking time to read His Word and pray and meditate is nearly an exercise in futility.

The length of the fast is not prescribed. But, you do need to think about your physical well-being in this regard. To miss a meal or two is one thing. To go without solid food for weeks on end, it would be good for you to consult your doctor and to slowly work up to that kind of discipline so you can monitor your physical response to the fast. If you have blood sugar issues, you must use extreme caution or else you could be violating God's command to take good care of yourself (1 Corinthians 3:16-17; 6:19). Most fasts of the Bible were one day (Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 14:24; 2 Samuel 1:12; 3:35), and they went all the way up to Moses' and Jesus' fasts of 40 days (Exodus 34:28; Deuteronomy 9:9; Matthew 4:2; Luke 4:2).

Fasting should not exclude drinking water or fluids as they are necessary to carry away toxins and insure that your vital organs are able to continue to operate effectively.

I would like to encourage all of you to take time to fast periodically. How and when is up to you. But, I would take Fred Adams' advice and start slow by missing one or two meals a day, and slowly work up to 2 days or more. To go more than 2 days I would seriously advise you to consult your doctor.

What kinds of obstacles might we fast if we were wanting to try to engage in the discipline of fasting? \_\_\_\_\_

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How can we overcome these obstacles? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Preaching/Worship as a “*Means of Grace*”:

For our third “Means of Grace” we need to look at probably the least understood and one of the most important disciplines. I would like to first of all look at what makes preaching and worship. Then, why it is effective as a “*Means of Grace*”. And then, what we can do to maximize preaching/worship as a “*Means of Grace*”.

Before we begin to investigate these three questions, I think it would be helpful for us to consider a couple of anthropological insights into human nature that may help to enrich our study.

- It is as impossible for a man to live without having an object of worship as it is for a bird to fly if it is taken out of the air. The very composition of human life, the mystery of man’s being, demands a center of worship as a necessity of existence. All life is worship...The question is whether the life and powers of man are devoted to the worship of the true God or to that of a false one. (G. Campbell Morgan, *The Ten Commandments*)
- The human heart is an idol factory. — John Calvin

**READ:** Luke 4:8 & Acts 17:16-34:

- 1- Luke 4:8, Acts 17 and the statements above from G. Campbell Morgan and John Calvin say a whole lot about us as human beings. What implications are there if these statements are in fact true? What makes you think these statements are true? Untrue?
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- Worship is written upon the heart of man by the hand of God. . . In a broad sense, worship is inseparable from and is an expression of life. It is not that man cannot live without worship, it is that he cannot *fully* live without worship. . . man was made to worship as surely as he was made to breathe. We may restrict the expression of worship for a season, just as we may briefly hold our breath, but there is an inward craving for worship that cannot be permanently stilled. (Judson Cornwall, *The Elements of Worship* (South Plainfield, NJ: Bridge Publishing, Inc., 1983), pp. 11-12)
- The history of mankind will probably show that no people has ever risen above its religion, and man’s spiritual history will positively demonstrate that no religion has ever been greater than its idea of God. Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. (A. W. Tozer, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, p. 1)

- 2- These are actually very significant statements. First of all, what is Cornwall saying? What is Tozer saying? Have you seen this to be true or not? If so, where? How?
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## What is worship?

The Eng. word “worship” derives from the Old Eng. “weordhscipe” and means “worthship”, i.e. worthiness, dignity, or merit, the recognition accorded or due to these, the paying of homage or respect. In the religious world the term is used for the reverent devotion, service, or honor paid to God, whether public or individual. (Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. Five*, p. 969)

If worship is to be what it was meant to be, then there has to be knowledge of God, true faith in Him, a humble walk before Him, a recognition of His gracious acts, a commitment to His will and ways. When these are present, and only when they are present, true worship is possible and has its proper place. Worship by its very nature is confession and service. On the other hand, the forms of worship cannot be substitutes for the inner core of faith and obedience. To put it simply, offering and festival are of no value without a penitent, faithful, and obedient heart. (Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. Five*, p. 982)

**READ:** John 4:19-24 & Philippians 3:3:

- “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.” Note how emphatic this is—MUST. There is no alternative, no choice in the matter. This “must” is final. There are three “musts” in this Gospel, equally important and unequivocal. In John 3:7 we read, “Ye *must* be born again.” In John 3:14, “The Son of man *must* be lifted up.” In John 4:24, “God *must* be worshiped in spirit and in truth.” It is indeed striking to observe that the first of these has reference to the work of God the Spirit, for His is the One who effects the new birth. The second “must” has reference to God the Son, for He was the One who had to die in order for atonement to be made. The third “must” respects God the Father, for He is the object of worship, the One who “seeketh” worshipers. And this order cannot be changed. It is only they who have been regenerated by God the Spirit, and justified by the Atonement of God the Son, who can worship God the Father. “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord” (Prv 15:8). (Arthur W. Pink, *Exposition of the Gospel of John*, p. 207)

- 3- What thoughts do you have as to why Jesus tells the woman at the well that those that worship God MUST worship Him in Spirit and in Truth? \_\_\_\_\_
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- There is a divine dialectic in worship. The Spirit and the truth are always interacting, the one leading to the other, then back again. The Spirit brings us into truth, and the truth draws us into the Spirit. In Jesus, we live in Spirit and truth, and He brings us to the Father whom we worship and adore. (Roger L. Fredrikson, *The Communicator's Commentary: John*, p. 101)
  - Omit the spirit, and though you have the truth, the worship becomes formalism, mere ritual observance. Omit the truth, and though the whole soul is thrown into the worship, it becomes an abomination. Thus "spirit and truth" form a unit, two halves that belong together in every act of worship. (R. C. H. Lenski, *The Interpretation of St. Johns' Gospel*, p. 323)
  - "Without the engagement of the heart, we do not really worship. The engagement of the heart in worship is the coming alive of the feelings and emotions and affections of the heart. *Where feelings for God are dead, worship is dead.*" (John Piper, *Desiring God*, p. 81)
- 4- What thoughts do you have as to why worship MUST be heart felt if it is to be regarded by God as true worship?
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5- What does it mean to worship in Spirit and truth? \_\_\_\_\_

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- To worship God is also to bow before his absolute, ultimate *authority*. We adore not only his power, but also his holy word. Psalm 19 praises God first for revealing himself in his mighty acts of creation and providence (vv. 1-6) and then for the perfection of his law (vv. 7-11). When we enter his presence, overwhelmed by his majesty and power, how can we ignore what he is saying to us? So, in worship we hear the reading and exposition of the Scriptures (see Acts 15:21; 1 Tm 4:13; Col 4:16; 1 Thes 5:27; Acts 20:7; 2 Tm 4:2). God wants us to be doers of that word, not hearers only (Rom 2:13; Jas 1:22-25; 4:11). (John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, p. 4)
- 6- Why is "bowing to his absolute, ultimate authority" such a hard thing to do for all people of all time . . . maybe even more so for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Americans?

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- William Temple’s definition of worship is helpful: “ To quicken the conscience by the holiness of God, to feed the mind with the truth of God, to purge the imagination by the beauty of God, to open up the heart to the love of God, to devote the will to the purpose of God.” (R. Kent Hughes, *Preaching the Word Acts: The Church Afire*, p. 349)

7- These definitions of worship center on acknowledging God and our response to who He is. Why does this help facilitate worship? \_\_\_\_\_

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- If there is no wonder, no experience of mystery, our efforts to worship will be futile. There will be no worship without the Spirit.  
If God can be understood and comprehended by any of our human means, then I cannot worship Him. One thing is sure. I will never bend my knees and say “Holy, holy, holy” to that which I have been able to decipher and figure out in my own mind! That which I can explain will never bring me to the place of awe. It can never fill me with astonishment or wonder or admiration. (A. W. Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship?*, p. 85)

8- What attribute of God sparks worship for you most easily? Why? What can we do to assist us to worship God more effectively? More comprehensively? \_\_\_\_\_

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- Worship is an outward expression of what we value most. (Derived from Ligon Duncan, *5 Keys to Spiritual Growth*, Ligonier Ministries tapes)

9- How does one come to the point of valuing God and seeing worship as most important?

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- Worship is a recognition of your desperate need for God. - anonymous

10- Thoughts about these statements. Why do we many times struggle to value God most?

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11- With these definitions and understanding the proper focus one should have to engage in proper worship, how much of what passes as worship today in the Western Church is actually worship?

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- If we could pick out one theme that has been particularly insistent in the evolution of Protestant worship since the eighteenth century, it would have to be subjectivity. By this I mean the tendency to construct and evaluate worship in terms of the human subject—human experiences, feelings, and responses—rather than in terms of the divine object, God, the blessed self-revealing Trinity, and his will, word, and activity. This subjectivity takes various forms, but they all share in common the view that worship is essentially something we experience, rather than something we offer, and that the quality of that experience is the measure of effective worship. (Philip Graham Ryken, *Give Praise to God A Vision for Reforming Worship*, p. 407)

12- What is subjectivity? What is there about subjectivity that can make it such a worship killer? \_\_\_\_\_

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13- Why must we be very cautious anytime we begin to evaluate a worship service in terms of OUR experience? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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14- What can we do to keep us from straying or migrating towards subjectivity? What standard do we possess that was given to alert us if we are straying and also gives us a benchmark by which to evaluate our worship? \_\_\_\_\_

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15- What can the leadership here at HFM do to assist you to be a better worshiper? \_\_\_\_\_

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- For a worship service to have vital worship, at least three things are required. First and most obviously, the Spirit must be working in and through the people of the church. Second, a preacher is needed who combines meaningful, biblical scholarship, comprehension of the dynamics driving today's culture, and pastoral insight about contemporary living. The Word must be persuasively proclaimed and insightfully applied. Third, the service must be geared to achieving vital worship of the living God. (Donald J. MacNair, *The Practices of a Healthy Church*, p. 94)

16- Do you agree or disagree? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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**READ:** 1 Timothy 4:13; 2 Timothy 2:15; 3:14-4:5:

17- Why is good Biblical scholarship so important to vital worship? What liability can ignoring of Biblical scholarship bring to vital worship? In other words, how can a rejection of learning, knowledge and scholarship actually inhibit worship? Is there any evidence that such a rejection exists or has ever existed? \_\_\_\_\_

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18- What human proclivity does Paul want to insure Timothy guards against while leading the church in Ephesus? (See 2 Tm 3:14-4:5) \_\_\_\_\_

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## Why is preaching/worship effective as a “Means of Grace”?

**READ:** Romans 10:17; 12:1-2:

19- What is there about hearing the message through the Word of Christ that builds faith in the life of a believer? \_\_\_\_\_

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20- What does the Apostle Paul, here in Romans 12:1-2, see as our spiritual or reasonable act of worship? Why? \_\_\_\_\_

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21- How is worship, viewed as a response to God’s mercy towards us, an effective means of grace? \_\_\_\_\_

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- While the biblical narratives do not spare David’s sinful side, they show a man who is willing to confess and be forgiven for his sin. In later literature this then became the biblical example of a true worshiper of Yahweh. Perfection of ethical and moral character was thus not indispensable for faith. Rather Yahweh desired an honest worshiper who could confess and praise Him in sincerity and truth (Mic 6:6-8). David becomes the example par excellence of a true worshiper, the traditional author of “the psalms of David” (e.g., 24, 150) that express cultic acts of worship. (Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. Four*, p. 1120)
- To a Pharisee, the service of God was a bondage which he did not love but from which he could not escape without a loss too great to bear. God, as the Pharisees saw Him, was not a God easy to live with. So their daily religion became grim and hard, with no trace of true love in it.  
It can be said about us, as humans, that we try to be like our god. If he is conceived to be stern and exacting and harsh, so will we be!  
The blessed and inviting truth is that God is the most winsome of all beings, and in our worship of Him we should find unspeakable pleasure. (A. W. Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship?*, p. 28)
- . . . the great Baptist preacher Geoffrey Thomas has said that in true worship men have little thought of the means of worship because their thoughts are on God; true worship is characterized by self-effacement without self-consciousness. That is, in biblical worship

we so focus upon God himself and are so intent to acknowledge his inherent and unique worthiness that we are transfixed by Him, and thus worship is not about what we want or like (nor do his appointed means divert our eyes from him), but rather it is about meeting with God and delighting in his delights. Praise decentralizes self. (Philip Graham Ryken, *Give Praise to God A Vision for Reforming Worship*, p. 64)

- True biblical worship so satisfies our total personality that we don't have to shop around for man-made substitutes. William Temple made this clear in his masterful definition of worship: "For worship is the submission of all our nature to God. It is the quickening of conscience by His holiness; the nourishment of mind with His truth; the purifying of imagination by His beauty; the opening of the heart to His love; the surrender of will to His purpose—and all of this gathered up in adoration, the most selfless emotion of which our nature is capable and therefore the chief remedy for that self-centeredness which is our original sin and the source of all actual sin." (Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Integrity Crisis*, p. 119)
- But in fact for thousands of people and pastors, I fear, the event of "worship" on Sunday morning is conceived of as a means to accomplish something other than worship. We "worship" to raise money; we "worship" to attract crowds; we "worship" to heal human hurts; we "worship" to recruit workers; we "worship" to improve church morale. We "worship" to give talented musicians an opportunity to fulfill their calling; we "worship" to teach our children the way of righteousness; we "worship" to help marriages stay together; we "worship" to evangelize the lost among us; we "worship" to motivate people for service projects; we "worship" to give our churches a family feeling, etc.

In all of this we bear witness that we are confused about what true worship is. Genuine affections for God are an end in themselves. I cannot say to my wife, "I feel a strong delight in you so that you will make me a nice meal." That is not the way delight works. It terminates on her. It does not have a nice meal in view. I cannot say to my son, "I love playing ball with you so that you will cut the grass." If my heart really delights in playing ball with him, that delight cannot be performed as a means to getting him to do something. (John Piper, *Brothers, We are NOT Professionals*, pp. 240-41)

22- What is likely to happen over a period of time if worship is allowed to become a time to simply "Make me a better person"? What thoughts have the previous statements generated in your heart/mind? \_\_\_\_\_

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- There is no subtler perversion of the Christian Faith than to treat it as a mere means to a worldly end, however admirable that end in itself may be. The Christian Faith is important because it is true. What it happens to achieve, in ourselves or in others, is another and, strictly speaking, secondary matter. For the Christian Faith will remain true whether we who profess it turn into heroic saints or into even more miserable sinners. We must insist that we worship God because he is God, not because we want something out of him. What a mean blasphemy it would be, to go through magnificent acts of

public worship always with the dominant intention at the back of the mind — “This is really going to make a better chap of me!” What arrogance and presumption, to treat eternal God, throned in glory, as a visual aid to moral self-improvement. (Harry Blamires, *The Christian Mind: How Should a Christian Think?*, p. 110)

- True worship always forgets itself. (Matt Redman, *The Unquenchable Worshiper*, p. 42)

23- Why is a focus on God and a forgetfulness about our own personal desires, wants and preferences, such a healthy facilitator or a means of grace? \_\_\_\_\_

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- Much of our problem in continuing fellowship with a holy God is that many Christians repent only for what they do, rather than for what they are. (A. W. Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship?*, p. 72)
- It’s who you are and the way you live that count before God. Your worship must engage your spirit in the pursuit of truth. That’s the kind of people the Father is out looking for: those who are simply and honestly *themselves* before him in their worship. God is sheer being itself–Spirit. Those who worship him must do it out of their very being, their spirits, their true selves, in adoration. -John 4:23-24 (Eugene H. Peterson, *The Message*)

24- How does real worship in Spirit and truth help us to see ourselves as we really are and also see God as He really is and thus increase our awareness of God’s mercy which in turn allows our worship to become even more intense? Why would this be a good thing? What do you see happening with this pattern of recognition of God’s mercy and then worship in response? \_\_\_\_\_

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## **What we can do to maximize preaching/worship as a “Means of Grace”**

READ Isaiah 40 & 55:8-9:

- Increasingly you find people talking about the worship *experience* rather than the worship *service*. That reflects what’s happening in the outside world. I’m dismayed to see churches abandon the means of grace that God ordains simply to conform to the patterns of the world. (Interview with Jim Gilmore, “No Experience Necessary,” *Leadership* 22, p. 31) (Philip Graham Ryken, *Give Praise to God A Vision for Reforming Worship*, p. 185)
- If God is small enough for us to understand, He isn’t big enough for us to worship.

- So if worship is going to be in accordance with his nature, and his nature is transcendent, infinite, and incomprehensible, then how else can we worship other than by the direction of His Word? Once again, our doctrine of God impinges upon our doctrine of worship. Given the distance between Creator and creature (a point of emphasis in Calvin, the Scholastics, Westminster, Van Til, and even Barth!), given the undeniable Biblical reality that God's ways and thoughts are as high above ours as the heavens are above the earth (Is 55:8-9), what makes us think we can possibly fathom what would please God, apart from his telling us what to do in his word? (Philip Graham Ryken, *Give Praise to God A Vision for Reforming Worship*, p. 54)

25- Thoughts. \_\_\_\_\_

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- Too many try to get something from worship without putting anything into it. - anonymous

26- What can we do to more significantly invest in worship? \_\_\_\_\_

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- The OT rituals and ceremonies heavily accent this need for the worshiper's preparation for and participation in the various prescriptions and requirements that have to be met. Consider David: "I will not offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God which cost me nothing" (2 Sm 24:24). "You cannot serve the Lord" was Joshua's admonition (Josh 24:19) to a people who in their easygoing, idolatrous ways had forgotten that "he is a holy God; he is a jealous God," who requires a whole-hearted and unshared dedication to His name and a commitment to His cause in terms of a full allegiance and avowal. Put into modern terms, these biblical verses stress the seriousness of our worship and the imperious claim it lays upon us. A flippant attitude to worship is obviously out of place and shows only that we have not yet even begun to understand what the worship of God is intended to be and do. Conversely, a deep sense of privilege in our approach to God will mean that our worship will be ordered with careful thought and thus will be acceptable to Him. (Geoffrey W. Bromiley, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Vol. Four*, p. 1131)
- Karen Mains in a book entitled *Making Sunday Special* has these investment possibilities to enhance worship:

**During the week:**

- I have mentally determined that Sunday morning with Christ in his church will be the high point of my week.
- I have learned what the main text of the sermon will be and have meditated on that passage.
- I have prepared myself to sing God's praises by reading through the hymns chosen for the service.
- I have carefully considered the offering I want to present to the Lord with gladness.
- I have prayed about inviting a friend who would benefit from being with me in Christ's presence.

**On Saturday:**

- I have asked Christ to make me sensitive tomorrow to the needs of people in the body who are hurting.
- I have solved the "Sunday clothes hassle" by making sure that what I will wear is ready today.
- I have spent time in confession so all will be right between myself and my Lord when we meet tomorrow.
- I have determined to get to bed early so I will be refreshed and ready for church tomorrow.
- I have planned on sustaining the delight of this time with Christ and his people by guarding against Sunday afternoon infringements.

**On Sunday:**

- I have gotten up in plenty of time so I will not feel rushed.
- I have programmed my morning so I will not just arrive at church on time, but get there early.
- I have eaten a good breakfast, so an empty stomach will not detract from my worship.
- I have my Bible in hand plus a pen and paper for taking notes.
- I have left for church with a great sense of expectancy because I know Christ will be there. (Karen Burton Mains, *Making Sunday Special*, p. 109)

27- Thoughts about Karen Mains' ideas. \_\_\_\_\_

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- No worship is wholly pleasing to God until there is nothing in me displeasing to God. (A. W. Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship?*, p. 125)
- Henri Nouwen once asked Mother Teresa for spiritual direction. Spend one hour each day in adoration of your Lord, she said, and never do anything you know is wrong. Follow this, and you'll be fine. Such simple, yet profound advice. Worship is the act of

the abandoned heart adoring its God. It is the union that we crave. Few of us experience anything like this on a regular basis, let alone for an hour each day. But it is what we need. Desperately. Simply showing up on Sunday is not even close to worship. Neither does singing songs with religious content pass for worship. What counts is the posture of the soul involved, the open heart pouring forth its love towards God and communing with him. It is a question of desire. (John Eldredge, *The Journey of Desire*, p. 177)

- It is a mark of spiritual barrenness in the church when people come to worship to fulfill a duty or keep a habit rather than satisfy an appetite. (Eric Alexander, *Truth for Life* tape 65562 Side A)

28- How is the counsel given by A. W. Tozer and Mother Teresa instructive in allowing Preaching and Worship to be effective means of Grace? \_\_\_\_\_

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- In the Old Testament, God condemned formal worship that was not accompanied by a concern for compassion and justice (see Is 1:10-17; Mic 6:6-8). In Hosea 6:6, God says, “For I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God rather than burnt offerings.” God did, of course, desire sacrifice; this is a rhetorical exaggeration or hyperbole. But the point should not be missed that authentic worship includes a life that is obedient to God. (John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, p. 9)

29- Thoughts about Frame’s statement: \_\_\_\_\_

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30- Not only is a worship experience that involves the heart crucial to allowing worship to be an effective means of grace, but the preaching and exposition of God’s Word is also a necessary ingredient in that experience. Why is this so? \_\_\_\_\_

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- God’s word must govern our knowledge of God, and thus its governance of worship is vital. Divine revelation must control our idea of God, but since worship contributes to our idea of God, the only way that God’s revelation can remain foremost in our thinking about God is if God’s revelation also controls our worship of God. God’s self-disclosure,

his self-revelation, is to dominate our conception of him, and therefore God's people are not to make images of God or the gods: "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth." (Philip Graham Ryken, *Give Praise to God A Vision for Reforming Worship*, p. 30)

- Scripture itself condemns worship that is based only on human ideas: "These people come near to me with their mouth and honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. Their worship of me is made up only of rules taught by men" (Is 29:13). This word of God through Isaiah was repeated by Jesus in Matthew 15:8-9 and Mark 7:6-7. Paul in Colossians 2:23 condemns "self-imposed worship," worship unauthorized by God. (John M. Frame, *Worship in Spirit and Truth*, p. 39)

31- What Old Testament story assures us that God is deeply offended when we choose to worship Him according to our own human inventions and preferences rather than as He prescribes for worship to take place? (See Leviticus 10:1-5)\_\_\_\_\_

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32- What is there about worshipping ONLY as God prescribes that serves to be a healthy influence upon our souls and a means of grace? What does the Frame quote above contribute to our understanding of this?\_\_\_\_\_

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- Feelings are great liars. If Christians only worshiped when they felt like it, there would be precious little worship that went on. Feelings are important in many areas, but completely unreliable in matters of faith. Paul Scherer is laconic: "The Bible wastes very little time on the way we feel." (Eugene H. Peterson, *A Long Obedience in the Same Direction: Discipleship in an Instant Society*, p. 50)

33- What is there about worshipping regardless of our feelings that serves to be a healthy influence upon our souls and a means of grace? How does the Peterson quote above contribute to our understanding of this?\_\_\_\_\_

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## **Other thoughts about Worship worth considering:**

- “My old effort to achieve worship with no self-interest in it proved to be a contradiction in terms. Worship is basically adoration, and we adore only what delights us. There is no such thing as sad adoration or unhappy praise.  
We have a name for those who try to praise when they have no pleasure in the object. We call them hypocrites.” (John Piper, *Desiring God*, p. 19)
- The debate gets so hot, it’s sometimes called ‘the worship wars.’ Some churches are fighting for traditional forms of worship, and others are fighting for contemporary forms of worship. The traditional people accuse the contemporary people of being superficial, and the contemporary people accuse the traditional people of being irrelevant. Isaiah points the way out of our wars into God’s peace by helping us think in God’s categories. His categories are not traditional versus contemporary worship but, more profoundly, acceptable versus unacceptable worship. And he has told us what kind of worship he considers acceptable: “The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit” (Ps 51:17 NRSV). Acceptable worship is sweetened with a spirit of repentance. (Raymond C. Ortlund, Jr., *Preaching the Word: Isaiah, God Saves Sinners*, p. 33)
- C. S. Lewis thought that too many new and unpredictable moments in a worship service could end up leaving people focusing on the worship rather than actually worshipping or, if you like, fixing their eyes on the service instead of Jesus. Lewis reminds worship leaders: “The charge to Peter was ‘Feed my sheep’, not ‘Try experiments on my rats’ or even ‘Teach my performing dog new tricks!’” (Matt Redman, *The Unquenchable Worshiper*, p. 57)
- I can safely say, on the authority of all that is revealed in the Word of God, that any man or woman on this earth who is bored and turned off by worship is not ready for heaven. (A. W. Tozer, *Whatever Happened to Worship?*, p. 13)
- That human emotions and reactions are involved in worship is, of course, undeniable. Awe, fear, gratitude, and love may all be experienced in worship. The point is, however, that these are not the controlling factors. They do not constitute the true essence. In the Bible the beginning lies in the object of worship rather than the subject. Nor is this an indefinite object. It is not the mystery behind the universe. It is not the universe itself. It is not an unknown factor. It is not man’s own potentiality. The object of worship, at once its starting-point and controlling factor, is not a projection of man. It is God. (Merrill C. Tenney, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, Vol. Five*, p. 975)



## Bible Study:

At this point in our study of “*Means of Grace*”, I would like to have us focus on one of my strengths as a pastor . . . Bible study. Whereas I struggle with fasting and prayer, I thoroughly enjoy, and in fact, relish, studying God’s Word.

You may have the idea that intense Bible study is only for pastors. Granted, the Apostle Paul is writing to a young Pastor Timothy when he says in 2 Timothy 2:15, “*Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.*” Also, Ezra makes mention to his intense study of the Scriptures in Ezra 7:10. But, these two encouragements to study God’s Word were not intended to be limited to the clergy only. In fact, I believe it was primarily lay people who searched the Scriptures daily to see if the Apostle Paul’s new “*Gospel*” lined up with God’s revelation to mankind (Acts 17:11). Furthermore, how can one know the truth if one doesn’t study the truth? And God’s Word is truth (John 17:17) and His truth will set us free if we learn it and know it intimately (John 8:32). Jesus taught that we ALL need to know the truth. So, we need to know how to study the Bible if we are ever going to be able to know the truth, discern what is true in other’s messages (Acts 17:11) and keep ourselves from error because we are able to discern truth from error (1 Corinthians 2:14; Philippians 1:9-10).

If you were to make an evaluation of why it is important to study God’s Word, based on God’s Word, what do you conclude is God’s reason for His desire for us to study His Word?

**READ:** Psalm 119:11

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**READ:** Psalm 119:105

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**READ:** John 17:17

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**READ:** Romans 10:17

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**READ:** 2 Timothy 3:16-17

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There are a couple of basic tools that I used as a lay-person, long before I ever became a pastor, that were very affordable and helpful for my personal study. As a lay-person, you probably have not committed to memory or may not even be familiar with where you would go in the Bible to get answers to your questions on a particular topic you may be pursuing. This is where a **concordance** (a book — or set of books that will tell you where to find any word that occurs in the Bible) or a **Bible dictionary** (a book or a set of books that give information and descriptions, as well as definitions and Bible references to issues, topics or terms in the Bible) come in handy. You can gain a lot of insight and do a lot of Bible studying just by owning these two resources.

Actually, today, there are several really good **Study Bibles** that are available that incorporate the best of all the basic study tools: Atlas, Bible Dictionary, Concordance, and Commentary.

Whenever you study the Bible, there are some basic principles and guidelines you **MUST** keep in mind. Here are a few and some hints or ideas that will help keep you straight (orthodox) in your thinking when you study the Bible:

- The Bible was originally written in Hebrew (OT) or Greek (NT). That means in order for us to read it in English, someone had to translate the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into English. Keep in mind, this is not an exact science and the translators' bias and/or inclinations will **ALWAYS** come through the translation. The best way to insure that you understand the message as it was originally intended to be communicated is to read several different translations side by side. If they all agree, then you can be confident you are reading exactly what God intended to communicate to us. If there is some disagreement between translators, that means that you are working with a text that can honestly be looked at with different meanings. At many times, each of those individual translations contain part of the truth. Personally, I like to compare the King James with the NIV with the Message. All three are faithful versions of the Bible with orthodox (or straight) translators who are faithful to the Biblical text. If I read all three of them and understand a unified message from all three, I feel pretty confident that my understanding is correct. If I see a variation in interpretations, then I need to do a lot more homework.

**READ:** Acts 2:38 - “Wanted: man **for** murder” does this mean “in order to” or “because of”

(Acts 2:38 - KJV) Then Peter said unto them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

(Acts 2:38 - NIV) Peter replied, "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ **for** the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

(Acts 2:38 - Williams) Peter said to them, "You must repent—and, as an expression of it, let everyone of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ—that you may have your sins forgiven; and then you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, . . .

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- Never forget that the last chapter of the Bible was written well over 1900 years ago, in a foreign language, and to a radically different culture than our own. They have phrases and speech idioms that are unique to their culture that (when translated woodenly) make no sense to us at all. Of course, we have them too in 21<sup>st</sup> Century American English. Just think how weird phrases like "I lost my head" or "He tossed his cookies" or, "That sounds fishy" or, "He kicked the bucket" are to someone from another culture. And yet, most of us know exactly what those phrases mean. The Bible has figures of speech as well. And it takes a good bit of study to discover what those phrases really mean . . . especially when we are so far removed from that culture. Many times a good Study Bible will give you an explanation.

**READ:** Romans 12:20 "Heap coals of fire on his head."

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- When talking about the doctrine of justification, it is crucial that you not look only to the book of James, but to Romans as well. It is only when you wrestle with BOTH texts that you can really come to a better understanding of the role of works in the life of a believer. For Paul is telling the Roman Church that we are justified by faith in Christ alone without works. But James tells us that if we claim to have justifying faith and that faith has no works or substance, then we have in actuality no faith at all but mere words. In other words, Paul is telling us the effective work of faith and James is describing the content of true saving faith. The same is true with every other subject. Don't just read one passage

and feel you have an answer. Check 2 or 3 or 100 other Biblical references to see if your understanding of ALL the Biblical texts is congruent with what you read from your initial passage. If it is, then you can be fairly confident you truly understand the text. If it is not, then you have more work to do to understand what God is saying. Always remember that God is incapable of lying or perverting the truth. So if one passage of Scripture appears to be in conflict with another, it is not God's fault they appear to be in conflict. It is OUR fault and it simply means we need to do more digging to discover the real truth.

**READ:** Romans 3:24-4:5 & James 2:14-24

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- Look for key words or ideas or phrases that occur over and over again in the passage. Make sure you understand the meaning of that key word or phrase. Don't assume you know the meaning. I am always amazed at my ignorance when looking up such much used words like those I have used recently, "conformed", "righteous", and "irrevocable." By recognizing key words or phrases you can begin to get a feel for what the writer's focus is for the text.

**READ:** Galatians 1:6-9

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- What is the context of the passage? Who wrote it? To whom is it written? Why was it written? What agenda or purpose did the author have in mind when it was written? This is so, so important. Context means everything. Think for a moment of the words: steal, suicide, smack, hit, and sacrifice. Your first impression may be that you are in a pretty rough neighborhood if these words are being used on a regular basis. But, what if I told you these words were coming from the dugout of a baseball game? It changes the whole feel for the use of these words. Reading the Bible is even more subject to dramatic change in tone and texture in our hearts and minds if we understand the context in which the Bible is written.

**READ:** Genesis 6:1-4; ch 15; & 1 Kings 17:1-6; 18:16-46

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- Even more important is the genre of the passage. If the passage is written as Law (Leviticus and Deuteronomy especially), then the passage needs to be read literally, and carefully as it is presenting to us the way things are rationally. But, if the passage is poetry, then the passage is written not so much to appeal to our intellect and reason as it is to touch our hearts (Psalms and Proverbs are poetry). Most of the time when you read the Bible you can tell when a passage is written in a poetic genre because the passage will be double indented to give is a visual distinction to alert you to read this as a poetic passage and not narrative or legal language. Furthermore, many books in the NT especially are letters, written from one person to another (or group of persons) to address a certain issue or answer certain questions. It is crucial you know the reason for the letter before you read it. Otherwise, you could totally misunderstand the contents of the letter.

**READ:** Psalm 23

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- See Jesus in EVERY passage. I know this sounds a little bit of a stretch, but Jesus Himself reveals Himself this way (Luke 24:13-35, 44; John 1:44-45; 5:39-40). Therefore, we need to find Jesus in the OT passages. Actually, if you gain a firm understanding of the NT book of Hebrews, this discipline actually becomes much easier.

**READ:** 1 Samuel 17:20-58 (David and Goliath) How can we see Jesus in this story? Why is it crucial we see Jesus in this story?

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- Think Hebrew! Most of us were educated with a Greek (Aristotelean) or a categorical mind-set. This means that we separate our knowledge into categories. When we studied science, we went to science class. When we studied math, we went to math class. When we studied history, we went to history class. As a result, we tend to put different concepts and ideas in separate boxes in our brain. The Hebrew mind set does not see life as a bunch of categories or separate boxes, but as an integrated whole. Which means you can begin to see how everything in life is interrelated. The Bible is written from a Hebrew mind-set. And the more you study the Bible, the more your mind will begin processing information in an integrated manner and not keep that information in separate categories. I can always tell when the Bible is doing its work in shaping the minds of others to integrate their thinking. When they begin to come up to me on a consistent basis and say such things as, “The message today dove-tailed perfectly with my devotions this morning, or with the Sunday School lesson or with a song I heard on the radio today.” It is not that my message had a universal application, it was simply that you have begun to think Hebrew. Your knowledge of anything is beginning to be related to everything.

**READ:** Ephesians 5:21-33; Hebrews 2:5-18; 13:4-6

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- Allow for mystery. This is God’s Word. This is God speaking to us. Do you think you are going to comprehend perfectly everything God says? Don’t be silly. John Calvin said that the Bible is God’s baby talk to us. Even God’s Baby talk has a whole lot we don’t understand. But, don’t begin to think that since you don’t understand it there is no benefit. That is thinking humanly. The most complex and most misunderstood book of the Bible (the book of Revelation) makes a promise of special blessing to anyone who reads the book of Revelation (1:3). You can be blessed by something you don’t comprehend. No, let me rephrase that, I think you are MORE blessed by what you don’t comprehend than by what you do. If we comprehend it, we tend to want to control it. Think for a minute about God’s grace, patience, love, mercy, compassion, and truth. Do you have the illusion in your own mind that you comprehend any of these? And yet, each one of us is wondrously blessed by the majesty and mystery of these attributes of God . . . even though, or because they are beyond our comprehension.

**READ:** 2 Peter 1:10

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- Read the introduction or preface to your particular translation of the Bible. They have spent thousands of hours to bring you the most accurate interpretation they know how. Most translations have included little keys that will make your understanding more complete. Do you know what the little subscript (a) or superscript (b) mean? What is the difference between Lord and **LORD**? Your introduction will be most helpful in making these subtle distinctions that bring clarity and meaning to the text.

**READ:** Psalm 110:1

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- Finally, don't be scared to ask for help. I spend less than 2 hours per week talking to individuals about questions they have about God's Word. You may think I am too busy. But, I can assure you, that being able to spend time with you discussing God's Word is invigorating to me. I will make time. Now if you come in and we end up talking about your nephew's warts, I will more than likely start yawning and looking at my watch every 2 minutes to see when this is going to end so I can get to more important issues. But, discussing and telling others what I know about God's Word . . . Well that is pure sugar and caffeine to me.

**READ:** 2 Timothy 3:16-17

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- The Word of God is inspired and directed by the Spirit of God. There is NO ONE on the planet who can give you as clear and as accurate an understanding of what God means by the text than the Spirit of God. Never fail to pray and plead with God that He provide for you the clarity and understanding you seek. The Spirit of God desires for you to understand. If you are a Christian, you already possess the Spirit of God living in you. Pray that God the Holy Spirit would work with your heart and mind to bring you to an understanding of the text.

**READ:** 1 Corinthians 2:6-16

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- Finally, God seems to only reveal insights into His Word as we are ready and willing to obey them. In other words, God will reveal some truth or change that needs to affect our lives. But unless we obey what God has already revealed to us, He will not give us more insight or discernment or power until we are faithful to obey what we have already been given.

**READ:** John 7:16-17; Romans 12:2

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## Bible Memorization

The next spiritual discipline or “*Means of Grace*” that I would like to share with you is Bible memorization. God’s Word has a couple of relevant passages that encourage us to memorize God’s Word. The first is from Psalm 119:11. The NIV Bible says it this way, “*I have hidden your word in my heart that I might not sin against you.*” The Psalmist here is telling us that hiding God’s Word in your heart is an excellent aid to fighting against sin. Do I need to say more? I would expect that every Christian would want to eliminate sin in their lives. And Psalm 119:11 is telling us that hiding God’s Word in our heart or Bible memorization can be a great tool in working towards that goal.

The second Scripture that I would like to point out in regards to the spiritual discipline of Bible memorization is from John 14:26 where (again the NIV) Jesus tells us, “*But the Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you.*”

The significant lesson that I would like for you to glean from this verse, in regard to Bible memorization, is this: If Jesus promised the disciples that the Holy Spirit would remind them of everything He said to them, will He not also then remind us of everything we put to memory from His Word? I believe He will and He does!

There have been many times (in fact, nearly every time I preach) that as I am preaching, God will bring to mind a Scripture verse that I memorized as a child or an adult. And He gave it to my mind or recall JUST when I needed it to make or reinforce a point. Sometimes the recall of that verse is from 30 or 40 years ago and I had totally forgotten that I had previously memorized it. And there, all of a sudden, just when I needed it, it is there in my mind for me to say to you on Sunday mornings or Wednesday nights. That is why sometimes I shock myself in what I say. I have even confessed to you all that what I have said was so good, I wanted to take notes on myself.

Now you know, it was not what I had in my notes. I had been considering that passage all week long. But, God gave it to me just when I needed it. So, it is not me, it is God reminding me. But, what a sad preacher I would be if I had not committed those verses to memory. And now, because I have done that in the past, and even though I have forgotten that I memorized them at one time, the Holy Spirit is capable and is faithful to bring those verses to recall just when I need them.

I would highly encourage you to take advantage of the Bible Memory Cards that are printed in connection with each Sunday morning message. But, I would encourage you even more, to memorize large sections of significant passages of Scripture as a whole. If memorizing a single verse is explosive; then to memorize a chapter or an entire book is nuclear.

I would like to encourage you to implement the “*Means of Grace*” or spiritual discipline of Bible memorization. And to really gain the benefit, I would encourage you to memorize a chapter (Psalm 1, 19, 23, 27, 121; Isaiah 40, John 3, 14, 15; Romans 5, 6, 8) or if you are really looking for a challenge, why not memorize an entire book (James, Galatians, Ephesians or Colossians).

You may be thinking, well, this is certainly important for a pastor to memorize verses. But, for us lay folks, it is not that big of deal. I would like to suggest it is a BIGGER deal for lay folks. Lay folks are the ones who are confronted more often with unbelievers.

You also need to know that I believe we need to memorize Bible verses all of our lives, but especially when we are young. I'm so convinced that I give (and have been giving for the last 6 years now) ONE DOLLAR to any student younger than 6<sup>th</sup> grade, who memorizes a Bible verse. And I have literally given away several hundreds of dollars (maybe thousands).

Come on, give it a try. Give the Holy Spirit a chance to amaze you. Give the Holy Spirit the resources within yourself for him to recall those verses just when you need them. It really is quite invigorating! Plus, it will help keep you from sin, encourage your spirit, guard your hearts and mind, and guide your steps.

**READ: Psalm 119:11**

1-Why is having the Bible committed to memory such a valuable asset? Can you think of any Bible events that demonstrate this value? \_\_\_\_\_

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**READ: Matthew 4:1-11 (Mark 1:12-13; Luke 4:1-13)**

2-What was Jesus able to do because He had the Word of God committed to memory?

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**READ: Hebrews 4:12**

3-What other attributes does the Word of God provide for the believer? \_\_\_\_\_

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**READ: James 4:1-3**

4-In the midst of spiritual battle, what benefit would having God's Word committed to memory serve the Christian?

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**READ:** John 14:25-27

5-What promise does Jesus give us about the ministry of the Holy Spirit? What part must we play in order for the Holy Spirit to do His job? \_\_\_\_\_

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**READ:** 1 Peter 3:15

6-How would having Scripture committed to memory assist you in obeying this command?

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**READ:** Psalm 119:105

7-How would having Scripture committed to memory assist you in making daily decisions?

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**READ:** 2 Timothy 3:16-17

8-What do these verses tell us about the “*usefulness*” of God’s Word that would be especially beneficial if we had Scripture committed to memory? \_\_\_\_\_

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**READ:** Ephesians 6:17

9-Here, God’s Word is called the “Sword of the Spirit”. What does that mean? Of what benefit would it have for believers to have the “Sword of the Spirit” available at every and any time?

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**READ:** Acts 17:11

10-What use did the Bereans have for God’s Word? What use would we have in this same regard if we had God’s Word memorized or hidden in our hearts? \_\_\_\_\_

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**READ:** Deuteronomy 6:4-9

11-Why do you suppose God wanted the Israelites to know, understand and obey this command?

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**READ:** Joshua 1:8

12-What promise does God make here if we would but read, understand and obey His Word?

How would having God’s Word memorized or hidden in our hearts, help this? \_\_\_\_\_

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**READ:** Romans 10:17

13-What final benefit do we see from hearing the Word of Christ (God’s Word)? How could having this “WORD” memorized possibly bring further benefit? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Sacraments as a *Means of Grace*

Both baptism and Communion have been more divisive for the church than they have been a *means of grace* within the church. This is really sad in light of the fact that God provided both to be a way for believers to be reminded of God's love and grace. In fact, I believe Jesus meant for baptism and communion to be two of the most powerful means of grace that were to be experienced in a real and tangible way that includes nearly all the senses. But, unfortunately, these sacraments have become such a source of division and controversy that much of the value of the sacraments has been lost in the conflict.

1- First, let's define some terms. What is a sacrament? \_\_\_\_\_

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*The Heidelberg Catechism* has this to say in answer to question # 66, what are sacraments?

A. Sacraments are holy signs and seals for us to see. They were instituted by God so that by our use of them he might make us understand more clearly the promise of the gospel, and might put his seal on that promise. And this is God's promise: to forgive our sins and give us eternal life by grace alone because of Christ's one sacrifice finished on the cross.

*The Free Methodist Catechism* has this to say in regard to the sacraments (Baptism and Communion or the Lord's Supper):

During His ministry our Lord set apart two ritual acts, baptism and the Lord's supper, that He commanded the church to observe. These sacraments are:

visible and external signs of an  
invisible and internal grace

Baptism is the sign and seal of the grace by which God washes us of sin and gives us new life in Christ. Holy Communion is the sign and seal of the grace by which God renews and sustains us, and by which we witness to the Lord's death. These gracious acts confirm and nourish our salvation as they are met with faith and obedience. (*Foundations of a Living Faith: The Catechism of the Free Methodist Church*, p. 25-26)

2. What do you think the FM Catechism means when it calls baptism and/or communion “a sign”?
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3. How would a sacrament or a sign be a *means of grace* if understood and applied with these definitions in mind?
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There was a defining moment in my spiritual life. It happened when I realized that if I insisted on becoming consumed by every major sporting event or political race, every move of the stock market, or even every worry of parenting, if I let these things seize my heart, I simply could not enter into a true celebration of the Sabbath or the joy of a baptism, or the Lord’s Supper, or Christmas or Easter, or any other true and significant celebration. I have learned the necessity of “guarding my heart” (Prv 4:23) because my heart does not have an infinite capacity to rejoice or be alarmed. By becoming preoccupied with passing things, I exhaust my heart’s ability to care about the things that really do matter. (Gary L. Thomas, *Seeking the Face of God*, p. 110)

## **BAPTISM**

The *Free Methodist Book of Discipline* ¶124 states about Baptism:

Water baptism is a sacrament of the church commanded by our Lord, signifying acceptance of the benefits of the atonement of Jesus Christ to be administered to believers as a declaration of their faith in Jesus Christ as Savior.

Baptism is a symbol of the new covenant of grace as circumcision was the symbol of the old covenant; and, since infants are recognized as being included in the atonement, they may be baptized upon the request of parents or guardians who shall give assurance for them of necessary Christian training. They shall be required to affirm the vow for themselves before being accepted into church membership. (*Free Methodist Book of Discipline* pgs. 15-16)

### **Some Quotes from the Heidelberg Catechism include:**

**Question 71.** Where has Christ promised us, that he will as certainly wash us by his blood and Spirit, as we are washed with the water of baptism?

**Answer:** In the institution of baptism, which is thus expressed: "Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost," Matt.28:19. And "he that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believeth not, shall be damned," Mark 16:16. This promise is also repeated, where the scripture calls baptism "the washing of regenerations" and the washing away of sins. Ti.3:5, Acts 22:16. (a)

**Question 72.** Is then the external baptism with water the washing away of sin itself?

**Answer:** Not at all: for the blood of Jesus Christ only, and the Holy Ghost cleanse us from all sin.

**Question 73.** Why then does the Holy Ghost call baptism "the washing of regeneration," and "the washing away of sins"?

**Answer:** God speaks thus not without great cause, to-wit, not only thereby to teach us, that as the filth of the body is purged away by water, so our sins are removed by the blood and Spirit of Jesus Christ; but especially that by this divine pledge and sign he may assure us, that we are spiritually cleansed from our sins as really as we are externally washed with water.

4. If baptism is a sign, then what is the sign of baptism pointing to that would serve to be a *means of grace* for our spiritual maturity, encouragement or strengthening?

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5. Historically, baptism has been associated with cleansing before coming into the presence of a deity. John the Baptist regarded baptism as a spiritual cleansing which was a means of preparing our hearts and minds for the coming of the Messiah. How can this insight make our own baptism an even greater *means of grace*?

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6. What does God's Word tell us about baptism? **READ: Matthew 3:1-17;** What does this text tell you about baptism? \_\_\_\_\_

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7. How does this help you to see baptism as a *means of grace*? \_\_\_\_\_

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8. What does God's Word tell us about baptism? **READ: Acts 2:38-41** \_\_\_\_\_

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9. How does this help you to see baptism as a *means of grace*? \_\_\_\_\_

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10. What does God's Word tell us about the sacraments? **READ: Romans 6:1-7**; What does this text tell you about baptism? \_\_\_\_\_

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11. How does this help you to see baptism as a *means of grace*? \_\_\_\_\_

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12. What does God's Word tell us about the sacraments? **READ: Galatians 3:26-28**; What does this text tell you about baptism? \_\_\_\_\_

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13. How does this help you to see baptism as a *means of grace*? \_\_\_\_\_

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See also concerning baptism duplicate verses which include: Matthew 28:19 Mark 1:2-11; Mark 16:16; Luke 3:1-22; John 1:19-34; Acts 8:12-16, 36-40; 9:18; 10:47-48; 16:15-33; 18:8; 19:3-5; 22:16; 1 Cor 1:13-17; Ephesians 4:5; Col 2:9-15; **1 Pet 3:13-22**.

### Quotes to Note include:

The question is not where *our* names are written, but where *his* name is written. In baptism we are numbered among the children of God, receiving the name of our Father, written, as it were, on our foreheads (Mt. 28:19; Rev. 14:1). (Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church—Contours of Christian Theology*, p. 104)

The Christian baptism of which Paul speaks in 6:1-11 was rightly seen by the early church to be the act of God that ended the claims of one ruler, the jurisdiction of Sin, and subjected the Christian to another Lord, Jesus Christ. (A. Katherine Grieb, *The Story of Romans*, p. 66)

As circumcision signified the covenant made with Abraham for his descendants, so baptism signifies the covenant made with Christ for his. But here is the key difference: Christ through his body bore the guilt incurred in the first covenant and ratified the second. Thus, when we enter the covenant, our baptism signifies the work that Christ has already done to fulfill its conditions. It is a sign that points us to the finished work of our Redeemer. (Philip Graham Ryken, *Give Praise to God A Vision for Reforming Worship*, p. 175)

The next thing that happens in the Acts account is a description of these people availing themselves of a “means of grace”: “*So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and there were added that day about three thousand souls*” (**Acts 2:41**). Baptism is part of the Great Commission (**Matthew 28:19**). Those who follow the Lord in baptism are showing their faith by their obedience, are testifying that they have left their old lives behind (Paul speaks of being buried with Christ and raised to walk in newness of life — **Romans 6:4**), and are expressing confidence that they have new life and circumcised hearts because of faith in Christ who is raised (**Colossians 2:11, 12**). One must conclude that baptism is part of God’s ordained means and Christians ought to avail themselves of it if they have not.

Baptism in the New Testament signifies a death: “*Therefore we have been buried with Him through baptism into death, in order that as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in newness of life*” (**Romans 6:4**). If we by faith follow the Lord in baptism we are saying that we do believe in Christ’s atoning death and in His bodily resurrection. We are also saying that having believed the gospel, we have died to our old manner of life. No longer do we serve sin, self, and the world, but we are now alive to Christ. The old self is “buried.” There is therein an expression of hope and a commitment to the new life

in Christ. There is substantial victory over sin now, and full victory when we see Him at His return (**1John 3:2, 3**).

Paul uses other analogies. In **Colossians 2:11-13**, baptism is the outward sign of an inward “circumcision” of the heart (see **Deuteronomy 30:6**). In this section Paul speaks of going from being dead in sins to alive in Christ, which is what having a circumcised heart is all about. In **1Corinthians 10:1, 2** Paul speaks of the Israelites “*baptized in the sea*.” As I write this, I am thinking of yesterday when we baptized some new converts. I used this passage to explain to them part of the implication of baptism. When the Israelites left slavery in Egypt and were miraculously brought through the sea, the sea closed behind them. God was bringing them to Himself at Sinai to make them a people. Likewise, when we are, in faith, obeying the Lord in baptism we are making a public statement that we are no longer going back to our old slavery because we are now and forever the Lord’s! Each of the people baptized yesterday said, “Yes that is what I want.” (**From Wikipedia.com “Means of grace”**)

## **COMMUNION** (Lord’s Supper or Eucharist)

The *Free Methodist Book of Discipline*, ¶125 states about Communion:  
The Lord’s Supper is a sacrament of our redemption by Christ’s death. To those who rightly, worthily and with faith receive it, the bread which we break is a partaking of the body of Christ; and likewise the cup of blessing is a partaking of the blood of Christ. The supper is also a sign of the love and unity that Christians have among themselves. (*Free Methodist Book of Discipline* p.16)

14. What does God’s Word tell us about the Lord’s Supper? **READ: Luke 22:19-20**; What does this text tell you about communion \_\_\_\_\_

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15. How does this help you to see communion as a *means of grace*? \_\_\_\_\_

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16. What does God’s Word tell us about the Lord’s Supper? **READ: John 6:32-59**; What does this text tell you about communion? \_\_\_\_\_

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17. How does this help you to see communion as a *means of grace*? \_\_\_\_\_

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18. What does God's Word tell us about the Lord's Supper? **READ: 1 Corinthians 10:16-22;** What does this text tell you about communion? \_\_\_\_\_

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19. How does this help you to see communion as a *means of grace*? \_\_\_\_\_

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20. What does God's Word tell us about the Lord's Supper? **READ: 1 Corinthians 11:20-33;** What does this text tell you about communion? \_\_\_\_\_

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21. How does this help you to see communion as a *means of grace*? \_\_\_\_\_

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## Some Quotes from the **Heidelberg Catechism** include:

**Question 75.** How art thou admonished and assured in the Lord's Supper, that thou art a partaker of that one sacrifice of Christ, accomplished on the cross, and of all his benefits?

**Answer:** Thus: That Christ has commanded me and all believers, to eat of this broken bread, and to drink of this cup, in remembrance of him, adding these promises: first, that his body was offered and broken on the cross for me, and his blood shed for me, as certainly as I see with my eyes, the bread of the Lord broken for me, and the cup communicated to me; and further, that he feeds and nourishes my soul to everlasting life, with his crucified body and shed blood, as assuredly as I receive from the hands of the minister, and taste with my mouth the bread and cup of the Lord, as certain signs of the body and blood of Christ.

**Question 76.** What is it then to eat the crucified body, and drink the shed blood of Christ?

**Answer:** It is not only to embrace with believing heart all the sufferings and death of Christ and thereby to obtain the pardon of sin, and life eternal; but also, besides that, to become more and more united to his sacred body, by the Holy Ghost, who dwells both in Christ and in us; so that we, though Christ is in heaven and we on earth, are notwithstanding "flesh of his flesh and bone of his bone" and that we live, and are governed forever by one spirit, as members of the same body are by one soul.

**Question 77.** Where has Christ promised that he will as certainly feed and nourish believers with his body and blood, as they eat of this broken bread, and drink of this cup?

**Answer:** In the institution of the supper, which is thus expressed: (a) "The Lord Jesus, the same night in which he was betrayed, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said: eat, this is my body, which is broken for you; this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying: this cup is the new testament in my blood; this do ye, as often as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For, as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till he come." 1 Cor.11:23-26. This promise is repeated by the holy apostle Paul, where he says "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread." 1 Cor.10:16,17.

**Question 81.** For whom is the Lord's Supper instituted?

**Answer:** For those who are truly sorrowful for their sins, and yet trust that these are forgiven them for the sake of Christ; and that their remaining infirmities are covered by his passion and

death; and who also earnestly desire to have their faith more and more strengthened, and their lives more holy; but hypocrites, and such as turn not to God with sincere hearts, eat and drink judgment to themselves.

**Question 82.** Are they also to be admitted to this supper, who, by confession and life, declare themselves unbelieving and ungodly?

**Answer:** No; for by this, the covenant of God would be profaned, and his wrath kindled against the whole congregation; therefore it is the duty of the Christian church, according to the appointment of Christ and his apostles, to exclude such persons, by the keys of the kingdom of heaven, till they show amendment of life.

### Quotes to Note include:

When we gather in public worship, we are ushered into the presence of Christ. He is among us (Mt 18:20). We do in worship what we were created to do—offer to God intelligent praise. We become more truly human at that point than at any other of human existence. Just as a boy is more aware of his identity as a son in the presence of his father, or as a husband is more aware of his identity as provider and protector in the presence of his wife, so we are most aware of who we are and what we were created to do as human beings at that point at which we bow in worship before our Creator and Redeemer. We are humbled as we offer to him our praise and adoration. We are cleansed as we confess our sins. We are built up, torn down, and rebuilt again as we submit to instruction by his word (Eph 4:11-16). We are fed and united to the whole body of Christ by the sacraments. Through the bread and cup we enjoy *koinonia* with Christ and one another (1 Cor 10:16). We access his strength through “all prayer and petition” (Eph 6:18) and are thereby enabled to fight the spiritual battles of life. (Philip Graham Ryken, *Give Praise to God A Vision for Reforming Worship*, p. 330)

Luke next tells us in **Acts 2:42** that the early Christians “broke bread” together. This signified more than having an ordinary meal together. F. F. Bruce explains: “The ‘breaking of bread’ here denotes something more than the ordinary partaking of food together: the regular observance of the Lord’s Supper is no doubt indicated.” The communion meal is all about the gospel and the significance of Jesus’ laid down life. Their fellowship included this important means of grace. I am going to take some time to explain the implications of communion because this means of grace is so tied to various church traditions that many Christians are unaware of the Biblical significance of it.

By partaking of communion in faith, Christians are remembering and proclaiming. Paul says this:

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you, that the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, “This is My body, which is for you; do this in remembrance of Me.” In the same way He took the cup also, after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in My blood; do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me.” For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes. (**1Corinthians 11:23-26**).

In these verses, Paul refers to the words of Jesus at the Last Supper. It is often overlooked that this was a Jewish Passover meal laden with Messianic significance. Jesus proclaimed His body and blood as the true Passover sacrifice that would take away sins. His laid down life would appease the wrath of God against sin. Jesus said, *“For this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for forgiveness of sins”* (**Matthew 26:28**).

The phrase “blood of the covenant” comes from **Exodus 24:8**: *“So Moses took the blood and sprinkled it on the people, and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant, which the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.’”* The phrase “poured out for many for forgiveness of sins” brings to mind this passage: *“Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great, And He will divide the booty with the strong; Because He poured out Himself to death, And was numbered with the transgressors; Yet He Himself bore the sin of many, And interceded for the transgressors”* (**Isaiah 53:12**). The Passover meal pointed Israel back to God’s past deliverance through which He made them a special covenant people, and forward to future Messianic salvation. The Christian fellowship meal (the Lord’s Supper) likewise points us back to God’s past act that delivered us and made us a people (Christ’s laid down life) and forward to God’s future act that will bring Messianic salvation to its fulfillment. Paul says we *“proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes.”* We are looking back in remembrance, looking forward in hope, and proclaiming the gospel in the process.

There is great hope expressed in Christian communion. In a first century Passover celebration, they had four cups of wine during the evening. From what is known about the way Passover was celebrated the “cup of blessing” that Jesus shared with them was the third cup. Edersheim comments: “This was called, as by St. Paul, [1 Corinthians 10:10.] ‘the Cup of Blessing,’ partly, because a special ‘blessing’ was pronounced over it. It is described as one of the ten essential rites in the Paschal Supper.” Edersheim further comments: “But we can have little doubt that the Institution of the Cup was in connection with this third ‘Cup of Blessing.’” Jesus, after partaking of the “cup of blessing” with his disciples said this: *“But I say to you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father’s kingdom”* (**Matthew 26:29**). The traditional fourth cup has been held in suspension for 2,000 years and awaits the time when Christ will come for His bride and celebrate the marriage supper of the Lamb. Paul says this: *“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until He comes”* (**1 Corinthians 11:26**). We proclaim the reason for our hope (the Lord’s death) and the object of our hope (The Lord Himself coming for us).

When He comes we shall experience the greatest of all Messianic banquets! Here is what Jesus says: *“And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline at the table with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven”* (**Matthew 8:11**). Unexpected people will participate in the eschatological, Messianic banquet, while many who thought that the kingdom was for them will be cast out: *“There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth there when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being cast out”* (**Luke 13:28**). In Luke 14 Jesus gave a warning to those who thought they would be blessed by “eating bread” in the kingdom of God (see verse 15). He warned that many would not heed the invitation to this Messianic banquet, so that servants would be sent out into the highways to bring people in (see **Luke 14:16-23**). Jesus promised his faithful disciples that they would, “eat and drink at My table in My kingdom” (**Luke 22:30**).

Christians of all types have been faithfully practicing the Lord’s Supper since Christ instituted the practice. But, alas, layers of unbiblical church tradition have been added to the practice. Nevertheless that the Lord’s Supper is still celebrated shows that God has preserved a

meal of remembrance for Christians that serves to preserve the promises, much like Passover has for the Jews up to this very day. It is indeed one of God's ordained means of grace.

Let us summarize what should be true whenever we receive communion. 1) We receive it in faith, trusting not in the act of taking communion, but in the finished work of Christ. 2) We do so in remembrance of the Lord, thus being linked with all of the redeemed who have done likewise since the Last Supper, sharing a common hope. 3) We receive communion as a proclamation of the gospel hope, publicly declaring the reason for our hope. 4) When we receive communion we are longing for the Lord's return to physically share that fourth cup with us. 5) When we receive communion we are expressing our hope in the future kingdom of God in which all true people of faith are reunited with their Lord and recline in table fellowship together.

The consummation of our gospel hope as expressed at the Lord's Supper is described in the following passage:

And I heard, as it were, the voice of a great multitude and as the sound of many waters and as the sound of mighty peals of thunder, saying, "Hallelujah! For the Lord our God, the Almighty, reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give the glory to Him, for the marriage of the Lamb has come and His bride has made herself ready." And it was given to her to clothe herself in fine linen, bright and clean; for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. And he said to me, "Write, 'Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.'" And he said to me, "These are true words of God." (**Revelation 19:6-9**)

Let us, as Paul said, examine ourselves to be certain that we are responding in faith to the invitation and are properly attired (see **1Corinthians 11:28; Matthew 22:12**). Let us believe the gospel, turn from trusting ourselves and trust only in the finished work of Christ whose blood was shed for sins, once for all, and who was bodily raised from the dead. Thus properly attired in the righteousness of Christ, we faithfully avail ourselves of the means of grace as He is working through His means to change us and prepare us for the Messianic banquet. (**From Wikipedia.com "Means of grace"**)

**22.** What kind of assurance does communion give you when you recognize that God sealed His promises to us by the blood of His Son Jesus?

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## Meditation as a Means of Grace

This is a means of grace (Spiritual discipline) that has great potential for much spiritual growth and maturity but is sorely lacking in 21<sup>st</sup> Century America. It could be that we don't see much demonstration of mediation (AKA: meditate, ruminare, contemplate, think long, think hard, consider, deliberate, dwell on, ponder, reflect, and wrestle) in our day because of the time requirements necessary to meditate well.

It could be we don't know how and simply need someone to show us the way. It could be we don't meditate out of fear. Both of what we might discover if we indeed did think hard and long on any issue or we may fear what may not in fact be there at all that we are really counting on once we really ponder an issue.

Whatever is keeping us from meditating, I pray that we discover a way and a motivation to make it more a part of our daily Bible reading, our listening ear for sermons, the lyrics and content of any and all communication mediums.

Take a look at the following **QUOTES to NOTE**. What emphasis does each make on the importance of meditation?:

Our reading of the Scriptures is often far too superficial. We just read a few verses and a brief commentary on them, then offer a brief prayer and rush off to work or something else. But before we can know anything of joy in God we must spend time with these things, and meditate upon them. To use the word of Isaac Watts, you have to *survey* them: 'When I survey the wondrous Cross.' A mere hurried and cursory reading of the Scriptures profits but little and never leads to true joy. (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Romans*, 160)

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The quest for the lost soul of Christianity always leads us back to the Bible. But rediscovering the wonders of Scripture requires more than reading. That's where the quest begins, but that's not where it ends. Not if you want to get it into your soul. You have to meditate on it. Then you have to live it out. Meditating on it turns one-dimensional knowledge into two-dimensional understanding. Living it out turns two-dimensional understanding into three-dimensional obedience. (Mark Batterson, *Primal, A Quest for the Lost Soul of Christianity*, 72)

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For that is the cause why there are so few contemplative persons to be found, for that few can wholly withdraw themselves from things created and perishing. -Thomas a Kempis

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We live in a culture in which we are superficial in our relationships. Image is everything. But with God the opposite is the case. Image is nothing. What is in the heart is everything.

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The word of God is truth. And we need to meditate or ruminate on truth until it becomes food for us. That is why Jesus said that His food was to do the will of His father and Jesus also echoed the words of Deuteronomy 8:3: “In that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.”

Are we taking in and chewing God’s word until it becomes food for our souls? I feel the reason so many of us are spiritually malnourished is because we are not taking in God’s Word like this. — paraphrase of Tim Keller

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New Israel, wrestle with God to receive a blessing. (From Genesis 32:28) Jesus forces us to wrestle with His sermons because (usually) He doesn’t explain Himself and He often speaks in parables which are subject to much contemplation and thought to understand and apply.

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The following are just a sampling of the many Scripture texts that encourage us to meditate. As you read each text answer what it is on which the Scriptural writer encourages you to meditate. Why do you think this is an important object upon which to meditate?

READ Deuteronomy 32:7 & Hebrews 13:7

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READ 2 Timothy 2:1-7

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READ Joshua 1:8; Psalm 1:2; 119:48, 78, 95, 97, 99; 128

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The sheer weightlessness of much contemporary preaching is a severe indictment of our superficial Christianity. When the pulpit ministry lacks substance, the church is severed from the word of God, and its health and faithfulness are immediately diminished. (Philip Graham Ryken, *Give Praise to God A Vision for Reforming Worship*, 110)

READ 1 Samuel 12:24; Psalm 77:12; 111:2; 143:5; 145:5; Ecclesiastes 7:13

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If in the presence of human superlativeness your self image comes crashing down around your ears, then even if you got into the presence of God who is pure love you would hate yourself. You would say, I'm so cruel, I'm so unloving, I used to think that I loved people but now I know that I have never loved anybody.

Think about it. If in the presence of human superlativeness your self image comes crashing down around your ears, how could it be different with God? How could it be otherwise with God? Here's how you know when you have begun to get into the presence of the real God, that you've begun to have God move into reality. You see that you are a sinner. You think you're lost. You see you are more capable of cruelty, more capable of evil, more selfish, more petty, more small minded, more impatient than you ever thought you were. And you know you are a sinner and you know you need to be rescued by grace. And if you say, "O that's real negative."

Come on, I just said to you, "If there is a real God (who is holy ) it would have to feel like that." How could it be otherwise? It couldn't be otherwise.

And if you say, "Well I just don't believe, that you know, that people should feel sinful." Well then you haven't been near God. (Tim Keller; *"The Gospel and Yourself"*)

READ Job 37:14; Psalm 119:27

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READ Psalm 8:3-9; Proverbs 6:6; Luke 12:24, 27

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READ Psalm 48:9; 107:43

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On the whole, God's love for us is a much safer subject to think about than our love for Him. — C.S. Lewis.

Here you may say, “I don’t like the idea of the wrath of God. I want a God of love.”

The problem is that if you want a loving God, you have to have an angry God. Please think about it. Loving people can get angry, not in spite of their love but *because* of it. In fact, the more closely and deeply you love people in your life, the angrier you can get. Have you noticed that? When you see people who are harmed or abused, you get mad. If you see people abusing themselves, you get mad at *them*, out of love. Your senses of love and justice are activated together, not in opposition to each other. If you see people destroying themselves or destroying other people and you *don't* get mad, it's because you don't care. You're too absorbed in yourself, too cynical, too hard. The more loving you are, the more ferociously angry you will be at whatever harms your beloved. (Timothy Keller, *King's Cross*, 176-77)

READ Psalm 119:148

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READ Ecclesiastes 5:18-19; 7:14; 9:1; Isaiah 57:1; Jeremiah 5:1; 2 Corinthians 10:7; Hebrews 10:24; James 1:2, 26; 3:5

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We believe that all truth can be stated in a few minutes. The answer to that is that it cannot, and the reason why so many today are living superficial Christian lives is because they will not take time to examine themselves. (D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *Spiritual Depression: Its Causes and Cure*, 12)

READ Galatians 3:6

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READ Mark 4:24; Luke 8:18

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READ Philippians 3:7-8

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Jesus' life, then, provided the first clue for my goal—contemplation (prayer, meditation, time alone with God) balanced with public ministry (teaching, healing, ministering to the poor). The two are not set against each other but joined together in a cooperative effort. (Gary L. Thomas, *Seeking the Face of God*, 27)

What kinds of things should we be meditating upon?

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What does it mean to die?  
What is life?  
Why does God love?  
Why do we find it so hard to trust God?  
Why did God make roses?  
Why do we so easily default to self-centeredness?  
Why does God ask us to follow the Law when sometimes it is not the best for me to follow it?  
Why does God forbid homosexuality?  
Why does God forbid sex outside of the covenant of marriage?  
Why does God forbid lying?  
Why does God forbid coveting?  
Why does God forbid worry?  
Why does God ask us to trust in Him?  
What does it mean to have joy or be happy?  
What does it mean to be satisfied?  
Where does desire come from?  
Where does preference come from?  
What does it mean to think, to dream, to imagine, to be human?

What methods or means can we employ that would make our meditations more productive?

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What prerequisites must be in place in order to make sure that our meditations are constructive rather than destructive?

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As Ted Koppel, host of ABC's *Nightline*, warned, "How does one explain, or, perhaps more relevant, guard against the influence of an industry which is on the verge of becoming a hallucinogenic barrage of images, whose only grammar is pacing, whose principal theme is energy? We are losing our ability to manage ideas; to contemplate, to think." (Os Guinness; *Fit Bodies: Fat Minds*, 80) Thoughts:

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What prevents you from engaging in more meditation?

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What can we do to employ it more often?

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If scriptural truth is not preached in its right proportions, if due emphasis is not given both to human responsibility and to dependence on divine grace, and if people affected by the superficial and the emotional are brought to a premature profession of 'faith', then serious consequences are bound to follow. (Andrew Murray; *Revival and Revivalism*, 208)

The worth and value of our soul is measured by what we love. If we love corrupt and wicked things we become corrupt and wicked. But the person who loves God spiritually grows and matures until he becomes like the One he loves. What a person loves is constantly on his mind. And what we think about has a power to transform our soul. We become like what we behold. (Henry Scougal and Robert Leighton; *God's Abundant Life*, 39)

The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existence. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity. (Ronald W. Clark, *Einstein: The Life and Times*, 755)



## Community as a Means of Grace

READ: 1 John 1:7

What is this verse telling us we should be doing?

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What does this mean?

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Community or fellowship is the means of grace that is very foreign to our culture and yet is much needed. It is through community (AKA: fellowship, *koinōnīa*, sharing, mutual encouragement or mutual support) that we grow in maturity, good deeds, compassion, patience, effectiveness, and thus grow in grace.

The Greek word for fellowship comes from a root meaning common or shared. So fellowship means common participation in something either by giving what you have to the other person or receiving what he or she has. Give and take is the essence of fellowship, and give and take must be the way of fellowship in the common life of the body of Christ.

Christian fellowship is two-dimensional, and it has to be vertical before it can be horizontal. We must know the reality of fellowship with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ before we can know the reality of fellowship with each other in our common relationship to God (1 John 1:3). The person who is not in fellowship with the Father and the Son is no Christian at all, and so cannot share with Christians the realities of their fellowship. (James Packer, *Your Father Loves You*, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986)

*The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible* says this about Community (Fellowship):

The meaningful words of *koinōnīa* and *metochē* are among the most powerful concepts in Judeo-Christian Scriptures. They apply first of all to participation in a person or project and a “common” spirit. Christians share “the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). Fellowship in the family of God comes after the new birth (2 Corinthians 5:17; 1 John 3:9). Christians partake of Christ (Hebrews 3:14), and of the Holy Spirit (6:4).

True fellowship results in mutual love (John 13:34). A “common salvation” (Jude 13) and a “common faith” (Titus 1:4) characterize true Christians.

The significant tr[anslation] “communicate” touches the heart of the Christian spirit (Galatians 6:6). He that is taught in the Word is admonished to “communicate”. Fellowship exists when there is community. This was an essential strength of the early Christians. Although a minority movement, they shared the strength of belonging to each other and to God.

. . . True NT *koinōnīa* is rooted in a depth of fellowship with God as Father (1 John 1:3, 6). The Fatherhood of God has significance for those who are in the family of God through the new birth.

Christians must continue to walk in the light to enjoy this fellowship. They are called to fellowship with the Son (1 Corinthians 1:9). The Lord’s Supper is a symbol of this inner fellowship (10:16).

Fellowship with the Spirit is a blessing of Christians (2 Corinthians 13:14).

The true *koinōnīa* is not only earthly, but continues and is consummated in heaven (Ephesians 2:21; Revelation 21:1-4). (Merrill C. Tenny, *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible: Vol. Two*, 528)

Why do you think some commentators see fellowship or community as one of the most powerful concepts in Christianity?

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In the vocabulary of Paul the word “brothers” occurs with great frequency; in fact, slightly more than 100 times. In Romans it is found 14 times. The fact that what the apostle generally has in mind when he uses the term is “those who are united in a common bond of Christian fellowship” is especially clear from such passages as I Corinthians 15:58; Colossians 1:2; I Timothy 6:2. Also at this point, the recognition of *The Family of God*, whose members are “brothers” and “sisters,” Paul is following the teaching and example of Christ. See Matthew 12:50; Mark 3:35; Hebrews 2:11. (William Hendriksen, *New Testament Commentary - Romans*, 52)

What does this quote say the Bible tells us the Body of Christ or the community of believers is like? Why do you suppose the Bible calls us this?

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The doctrine of the Trinity, therefore, rests not on reason but on the experience of the Christian community—and, ultimately, on the Revelation of God. (Chad Walsh, *Early Christians of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, 61)

After all, we were created in the image of a God who has revealed for all of eternity in a mysterious form of interrelationship among the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. So this concept of community has its origin in the Godhead. It's appropriate, then, that shortly after God created the first person, he concluded, "It is not good for the man to be alone." Man needed someone to share his life with. (Lee Strobel; *God's OUTrageous Claims*, 121)

**READ:** Genesis 2:18 & 1:26-27. What is there about us that it is not good for us to live outside of community?

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Let him who cannot be alone beware of community. Let him who is not in community beware of being alone. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 78)

**Pride** is the **chief threat** to unity among Christians. And the highest form of that pride is seen when a believer thinks he can operate independently of his brethren or doesn't need them. This occurs, for example, when a Christian refuses to walk with other members of the body because they disagree with his doctrines. He is thinking more highly of himself than he ought to think when he exalts his knowledge (though acquired through the use of his gifts) over fellowship with the Lord's family. When he says, "I won't walk with you because you disagree with my ideas," he is allowing KNOWLEDGE (not faith) to puff his ego. He has reached the place where his SELF-ESTIMATE is greater than God's! God condescends to walk with the worst of us, but there are those believers who won't. Sometimes whole groups of believers separate, claiming they are the only true church or have the only correct way to worship God. In other cases, individuals separate themselves from all forms of organized Christianity, hoping to achieve some greater purity or oneness with the Lord. But that's impossible for the body of Christ is ALREADY ONE. Since all true Christians are ONE in Christ, separating from denominations or merging them can't add to the oneness. Those who refuse to use their gifts to maintain the unity of believers on earth, fail to recognize the interdependence of the various parts of the body. Claiming great wisdom, they use their gifts to feed their own egos, and end up dividing those who should be working together for Jesus. (C. S. Lovett, *Lovett's Lights on Romans*, 324-25)

As his letters to the Corinthians suggest, Paul has not been shy about exhorting these churches to participate in the collection. But their participation is, nevertheless, of their own free will: they were "pleased"; they "freely decided" to make a contribution. Paul suggests something of the significance of this contribution by calling it a *koinōnīa*, literally, a "fellowship." Here the word clearly means "that which is readily shared," "contribution," but there is certainly an allusion to the word's common use in Paul to denote the loving intimacy of the Christian community. As Paul makes explicit in 2 Corinthians 8:4 and 9:13, the Gentile Christians' contribution to the Jewish Christians in Jerusalem is an expression of this unity and intimacy. (Douglas Moo, *The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, 903)

Everybody who belongs to Jesus belongs to everybody who belongs to Jesus.

Thoughts!?!  

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## **I. Community to cultivate humility:**

READ: Ephesians 4:1-3 (see also 1 Peter 5:5)

How does community help to cultivate humility?  

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Why is humility crucial for growing in grace?  

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Community is essential for humility because how we treat others is a better test of our humility than how we treat ourselves. (Gary L. Thomas, *Seeking the Face of God*, 135)

Self-righteous service fractures community. True service, on the other hand, builds community. (Richard Foster; *Celebration of Discipline*, “The Discipline of Service”)

A person does not reveal weakness or liability in such a manner in the early stages of a relationship, if at all. In fact, that commonly is the problem: we never get to admitting weaknesses that each of us bring to the team. And it is those weaknesses, not the projected strengths, which commonly create the problems that divide team members from one another.

I have found that the freedom to admit weaknesses and need to one another on a level playing field is one of the most important qualities of team life—and of real Christian community. We have known that admitting our sin and weakness to God is core to our respective personal relationships with God. But it is also a core part of healthy team life, essential for learning to value one another. In fact, through these team-building seminars I have discovered an amazing principle of life in the body of Christ.

God has designed each of us with great strengths to offer to one another. But God has also designed each one of us with intrinsic weakness—not sin, but rather areas where we are not as strong as others—so that we would need others. (Paul R. Ford, *Knocking Over the Leadership Ladder*, 45)

What do the quotes from above tell us about community and humility?

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The command to “live in harmony with one another” (v. 16a) summarizes the overall thrust of these verses with specific reference to the believing community. Perhaps the greatest obstacle to this unity of mind and spirit is pride. As a result, as he does in Philippians 2:1-4, Paul urges Christians to avoid pride and to humble themselves as the key step toward genuine unity. We are not to “be proud” (cf. Romans 11:20) but to “associate with people of low position” (NIV). (Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans*, 412)

To forego self-conceit and to associate with the lowly means, in all soberness and without mincing the matter, to consider oneself the greatest of sinners. This arouses all the resistance of the natural man, but also that of the self-confident Christian. It sounds like an exaggeration, like an untruth. Yet even Paul said of himself that he was the foremost of sinners (1 Timothy 1:15); he said this specifically at the point where he was speaking of his service as an apostle. There can be no genuine acknowledgment of sin that does not lead to this extremity. If my sinfulness appears to me to be in any way smaller or less detestable in comparison with the sins of others, I am still not recognizing my sinfulness at all. My sin is of necessity the worst, the most grievous, the most reprehensible. Brotherly love will find any number of extenuations for the sins of others; only for my sin is there no apology whatsoever. Therefore my sin is the worst. He who would serve his brother in the fellowship must sink all the way down to these depths of humility. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 96)

This is a powerful insight from Dietrich Bonhoeffer. What is he saying here? Do you think it is significant? Why or why not?

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## **II. Community to cultivate spiritual maturity or confidence:**

READ: Ephesians 5:19; Acts 2:42; Colossians 2:1-5; 3:16; (see also: 1 Corinthians 1:10; 10:16-17; Ephesians 2:14-22)

What do these verses have to tell us about maturity and confidence in our spiritual walk?

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Think of the great revivals of the last 400 years and you will find that all of them had in common the desire to meet and get together often if not daily for Bible Study, fellowship and prayer (Luther, Calvin, Wesley, Whitefield, Edwards)

The more single-minded we become, the more thoroughly committed to God all our efforts will be, the more his purposes can be accomplished in them, and the greater Hilarity we will experience. Our tendency to slip so easily into manipulation of others for our own ends is one of the greatest destroyers of genuine community, but to recognize our constant battle for purity of motive enables us to keep growing toward maturity in our faith and in the Body. (Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12*, 133)

Too often we think that unity is achieved by backing down on certain things in order to keep the peace. If peace in a congregation is achieved by some people giving up their principles or being overly nice so that everyone can agree, then the community might as well not exist. It will have lost the Hilarity of truth. (Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12*, 245)

What are the quotes above attempting to communicate? Why is this important for growth and maturity?

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A healthy body is necessary to do effective work. To attempt evangelism while the body of Christ is sick and ailing is worse than useless. It is not difficult to keep a body of Christians healthy and vital if the individuals involved (especially leaders) are concerned to bear one another's burdens, confess their faults one to another, and to instruct and admonish one another in love, by means of the word of God. It is by these means that the church is becoming what its Lord desires: *a church in splendor, without spot or wrinkle or any such thing* (Ephesians 5:27). (Ray C. Stedman, *Body Life*, 114)

### III. Community to cultivate selflessness:

READ: Romans 12:9-13 (see also: Gal 5:13; Ephesians 5:21; 1 Peter 4:8-11)

What do these verses have to tell us about cultivating selflessness in our spiritual walk?

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Nowhere in the N.T. do any of the Greek words translated "fellowship" imply fun times. Rather, they talk of, for example, "The fellowship of the ministering to the saints" (2 Corinthians 8:4) as sacrificial service and financial aid. (See for example, I Timothy 6:18). Elsewhere, Paul was thankful for the Philippian believers' "fellowship in the gospel" (Philippians 1:5), for he knew that "inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers (same word as fellowship) of my grace" (Philippians 1:7). This sort of fellowship may even bring persecution. We are to emulate Christ's humility and self-sacrificial love (Philippians 2:5-8) through the "fellowship of the Spirit" (Philippians 2:1). In some ways known only partially to us, we have the privilege of knowing "the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death" (Philippians 3:10), and even the communion (i.e. fellowship) of the blood...and body of Christ" (I Corinthians 10:16). — J.D. Morris.

What is the quote above trying to communicate? Do you think it is significant? Why or why not?

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The basis for requiring a minimum community for certain prayers comes from Leviticus 22:32: **"...that I may be sanctified in the midst of the Israelite people..."** suggesting that the sanctification of God's name is a public obligation. This concept clearly leads to the potential for developing strong interpersonal relationships and social ideals, a community obligated to mutual aid and aware of a responsibility to its own members and to all humanity. Community worship is an antidote to self-centeredness. (Dr. Laura Schlessinger, *The Ten Commandments The Significance of God's Laws in Everyday Life*, 119)

The search for community in our Western postmodern world is, unquestionably, both real and pervasive. But just because people want community does not mean that their approaches to finding greater unity and purpose in relationships, or fulfilling important tasks together, will bring intimacy or any sense of real community. More specifically, in the evangelical Christian world, when the focus on community in team or small group life does not move beyond the wants, needs, or task fulfillment of the individual, it is extremely difficult to build a depth of lasting unity in relationships. Put simply, it is difficult to find the communion of the Holy Spirit when the spotlight is on the self. (Paul R. Ford, *Knocking Over the Leadership Ladder*, 34-35)

What are the quotes above trying to communicate? Do you think they are significant? Why or why not?

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Our culture is not characterized by persons taking time for one another. Many factors of our society militate against such an investment of ourselves, yet the sacrifice of time always proves to be well worth the effort. Social scientists have commented in recent years that the need for psychologists and psychiatrists would be greatly reduced if we would return to such former patterns of caring as lap time for a child, neighborhood gatherings over coffee, family play times, or couples swinging on the front porch on summer evenings.

We can't mourn hurriedly. Nor can we drink deeply of the delights of our lives if we are always rushing through things. For "with-ness" to happen, we need to spend time in conversations, in worship, in wonder, in waiting. (Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12, 235-36*)

Often our money is not the best thing we could give them. More urgently they might need your farming skills, your medical expertise, or your time to help refugees resettle in a strange land. What is called for here is not necessarily financial generosity, but—vastly more important—an attitude of heart that says, "Whatever is mine is yours." (Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12, 126*)

In 21<sup>st</sup> Century American materialism, our possessions are our gods. And the more we have the bigger our god. But, in the Kingdom of God, we should be willing to share what we own with others if it is the loving thing to do. I think the following insight from Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan from Luke 10:25-37 is instructive.

Prodigal Son lesson:  
Thief: Whatever is yours is mine  
Levite: Whatever is mine is mine  
Samaritan: Whatever is mine is yours

Thoughts?

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#### **IV. Community to cultivate good deeds:**

READ: Hebrews 10:24-25

What do you think the writer of Hebrews is trying to tell us here?

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The metaphor of the church as a body is employed by the New Testament to represent both our union with Christ and mutual dependence: “The eye cannot say to the hand, ‘I have no need of you’” (1 Corinthians 12:21). We need each other: “We, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Romans 12:5). We need each others’ gifts (Ephesians 4:11-16; 1 Corinthians 12-14; Romans 12). We need each other’s graces (as in the many “one anothers” found throughout the New Testament: love one another, be kind to one another, bear one another’s burdens, etc.). We need each other’s fellowship. So we are warned, “Let us consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking our own assembling together.” The writer to the Hebrews sees the public assembly as the primary place in which the mutual stimulation to “love and good deeds” takes place: “Not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging *one another*, and all the more as you see the day drawing near” (Heb 10:24-25). (Philip Graham Ryken; *Give Praise to God A Vision for Reforming Worship*, 330-31)

Thoughts!?!

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#### **V. Community to cultivate compassion:**

READ: Romans 12:15; Ephesians 4:32; 1 Peter 3:8-9

What do these verses have to tell us about cultivating compassion in our spiritual walk?

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How does one develop compassion? Where must true compassion originate in order to be sincere and not just “doing what I am supposed to do”?

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## **VI. Community to cultivate patience and grace:**

READ: Romans 14:1-4; 15:7; Ephesians 4:1-6; (see also Romans 12:16; Colossians 3:13; 1 Peter 3:8)

What do these verses have to tell us about cultivating patience and grace in our spiritual walk?

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How does living in community naturally help develop patience and grace?

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The weak in faith are not necessarily lesser Christians than the strong. They are simply those who do not think their faith allows them to do certain things that the strong feel free to do. What Paul wants the strong to do is not simply extend grudging tolerance to the weak, but to welcome them (the verb *proslambano*, used here, means to receive or accept into one’s society, home, circle of acquaintance). They should not allow differences over “disputable matters” to interfere with full fellowship in the body of Christ. (Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans*, 448)

To dwell above with saints we love  
that will be glory  
But to dwell below with saints we know  
. . . Well that is another story.

What are the quotes above telling us? How can they be instructive in assisting us to cultivate patience and grace in our spiritual walk?

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## VII. Community to cultivate accountability:

READ: Colossians 3:16

What does it mean to be accountable to one another?

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What does Paul in Colossians 3:16 mean by admonish?

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“Faith is the main root of spiritual growth. Spiritual disciplines strengthen faith by leading us to prayer and by regularly exposing us to truth, as a solar battery is charged by exposure to light. Taken alone, however, the way of discipline can encourage the delusion that spiritual renewal is a matter of individual achievement. It needs to be balanced by the awareness that we are spiritually renewed as we are refreshed by the gifts of other believers in community and as the Holy Spirit is poured out in answer to corporate prayer.” (Richard Lovelace; *Renewal as a Way of Life*, 10-11)

Though you love the people, it does not follow that you must fellowship with them as Christians because they belong to the church. Many appear to think that Christian love and fellowship necessarily go together. This is often assumed as though it were a self-evident truth. Some who profess a large amount of charity will not hesitate to pronounce you uncharitable, that is, deficient in love, if you do not receive heartily into your fellowship all who are in good standing in evangelical churches. This charge proceeds upon the assumption that a lack of fellowship is a lack of love. This assumption is false and dangerous.

Christian love and fellowship do not necessarily go together. Love depends upon our own religious condition. Fellowship takes into account the condition of another. We can have love for another - a real desire to promote his welfare - whatever may be his state. But we cannot in our hearts have Christian fellowship for one who, as we believe, gives us good reason to think he is not a Christian. (B.T. Roberts, *Fishers Of Men*, 141)

Who is B.T. Roberts? Is this quote significant? Why or why not?

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We must realize that whenever we dabble with evil in the slightest way, our love is spoiled. If we fudge truth just a little in talking to a friend, the relationship is marred. The community is made unclean by the slightest bit of gossip. The smallest trace of games, pretensions, or manipulations in our care for others makes our love less than whole or holy. We want to hate with a perfect hatred all those little jabs that puncture our love. (Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12*, 151)

What are your thoughts concerning this quote?

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It is critically important in the Christian community that we help each other struggle in stark confrontations with our dark sides. (Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12*, 272)

In confession the break-through to community takes place. Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person. This can happen even in the midst of a pious community. In confession the light of the Gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. The sin must be brought into the light. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 112)

How does a community that promotes accountability make this quote significant?

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The mind and flesh of man are set on fire by pride; for it is precisely in his wickedness that man wants to be as God. Confession in the presence of a brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation. It hurts, it cuts a man down, it is a dreadful blow to pride. To stand there before a brother as a sinner is an ignominy that is almost unbearable. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 114)

Why is it that it is often easier for us to confess our sins to God than to a brother? God is holy and sinless, He is a just judge of evil and the enemy of all disobedience. But a brother is sinful as we are. He knows from his own experience the dark night of secret sin. Why should we not find it easier to go to a brother than to the holy God? But if we do, we must ask ourselves whether we have not often been deceiving ourselves with our confession of sin to God, whether we have not rather been confessing our sins to ourselves and also granting ourselves absolution. And is not the reason perhaps for our countless relapses and the feebleness of our Christian

obedience to be found precisely in the fact that we are living on self-forgiveness and not a real forgiveness? Self-forgiveness can never lead to a breach with sin; this can be accomplished only by the judging and pardoning Word of God itself. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 115-16)

A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person. As long as I am by myself in the confession of my sins everything remains in the dark, but in the presence of a brother the sin has to be brought into the light. But since the sin must come to light some time, it is better that it happens today between me and my brother, rather than on the last day in the piercing light of the final judgment. It is a mercy that we can confess our sins to a brother. Such grace spares us the terrors of the last judgment. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 116)

Thoughts about these last three quotes from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*?

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Anybody who has once been horrified by the dreadfulness of his own sin that nailed Jesus to the Cross will no longer be horrified by even the rankest sins of a brother. Looking at the Cross of Jesus, he knows the human heart. He knows how utterly lost it is in sin and weakness, how it goes astray in the ways of sin, and he also knows that it is accepted in grace and mercy. Only the brother under the Cross can hear a confession. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 118)

Thoughts about this last quote?

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The implication of the relationship between verses 1-2 and verses 3-8 (*of Romans 12*) is that I cannot fully “renew my mind” without the active help of other believers. I cannot understand what Scripture teaches apart from dialog with others who are reading that same Scripture. I cannot live the life of a disciple of Christ apart from the nurturing context of a community of believers who encourage me, pray for me, and set an example for me. I cannot discern the blind spots in my obedience to Christ without other believers to point them out to me. Here is where the attitude of arrogance that Paul rebukes in verse 3 can get in the way. We think of ourselves “more highly than [we] ought” and so conclude that we do not need the help of others. (Douglas J. Moo, *The NIV Application Commentary: Romans*, 407)

Thoughts!?!

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## VIII. Community to cultivate mutual encouragement and support

(friends):

READ: Romans 1:11-13; 15:1-7; 1 Thessalonians 5:11 (see also: Amos 3:3; Hebrews 3:13)

What do these verses have to tell us about cultivating mutual encouragement and support in our spiritual walk?

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In this hostile culture where believers get torn down just walking out their front doors, we need to pour all our energies into building up the body of Christ. It is all about the goal. It's not about the gift. (David Jeremiah, *Jesus' Final Warning*, 148)

The emphasis is on the "with-ness." Our mourning with them dare not be in a condescending way, as if to say, "If you must cry, I'll put up with it this time, but really you must get stronger so that you can face things better."

What enables us to be genuine about the "with-ness" is the realization that we each have certain areas of weakness in which we need to be supported by the rest of the community. Paul began his discourse to the Romans with this assurance: "both you and I will be helped at the same time, you by my faith and I by yours" (1:12, TEV). The apostle knew that no one is greater or lesser among the people of God. We all have gifts to give to each other; we all have dimensions of maturity greater than others' as well as phases of our existence in which we are not so strong. Thus, our mourning with others is genuine because we mourn for ourselves, too, at the same time, and for all the pain people have suffered and do suffer and will suffer as long as we are human. (Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12*, 234)

Thoughts!?!  

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Paul does not write as one who has arrived (Philippians 3:12). He too is part of the body of Christ, which means that his life is incomplete apart from other members of that body. He pays the Romans a great compliment in conveying that he stands in need of their company. (James R. Edwards, *New International Biblical Commentary*, 348)

The emphasis is not on identity of doctrine but on mutuality, appreciation of one another, and thankfulness to be with one another in the body of Christ. (James Montgomery Boice, *Romans, Vol. 4, The New Humanity*, 1813)

Most 21<sup>st</sup> Century American Christians would hardly see being a part of the Body of Christ as deserving a sincere response of thankfulness. Many would consider being a part of the Body a necessary obligation. Not a joy. Do you see this as true or not? Why should being a part of the Body of Christ be a joy?

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When apostolic teaching is attacked within the church, it is our duty to stand up for the truth of the Scriptures, and if a division comes as a result of it, the cause of that division must be laid to rest on the shoulders of those who deviate from the apostolic truth. It is not just a case of deciding who is the majority and who is the minority. Those responsible for dividing the body of Christ will be judged by God, and that judgment will be against those who have departed from the apostolic teaching. If you ever are involved in bringing divisions in any way in the body of Christ, you had better make very sure that you are standing on the side of the Scripture and not against the Scriptures. (RC Sproul, *The Gospel of God: Romans*, 253)

Hebrews 10:25 instructs us not to neglect the assembly of the saints. Instead, we are to gather and encourage one another more and more as we await Jesus' return. The public assembly is meant for the edification, the building up, the growth of the Christian. Neglecting to participate in the corporate life of the church or failing to actively serve and be served is a sure-fire way to limit our growth. Ephesians 4:11-16 offers a pretty strong argument that participation in the body of Christ is the main way in which Christ strengthens and matures us. When we serve others in the church, bear with one another, love one another, correct one another, and encourage one another, we participate in a kind of "spiritual maturity co-op" where our stores and supplies are multiplied. The end result is growth and discipleship. (Thabiti M. Anyabwile, *What is a Healthy Church Member?*, 91)

Thoughts?

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He knows about the reciprocal blessings of Christian fellowship and, although he is an apostle, he is not too proud to acknowledge his need of it. Happy is the modern missionary who goes to another country and culture in the same spirit of receptivity, anxious to receive as well as give, to

learn as well as teach, to be encouraged as well as to encourage! And happy is the congregation who have a pastor of the same humble mind! (John Stott, *Romans - God's Good News for the World*, 57)

Thoughts?

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## **IX. Community to cultivate a powerful witness to unbelievers:**

READ: John 17:20-23

What do these verses have to tell us about cultivating a powerful witness to unbelievers through Christian community in our spiritual walk?

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Why would the world negate our sincerity and ignore our message if we are not united in the Body of Christ? What does that have to do with anything?

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We must recognize that the world does not owe the Church's prophets a hearing and might not listen. Only as we become a Christian community with a truly biblical life-style can our prophetic words carry the credibility of a demonstrated alternative to the society around us. (Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12*, 107)

Thoughts?

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## **X. Community to cultivate love:**

READ: John 13:34-35; Galatians 6:1-2; Philippians 2:1-11; 1 John 4:7-13 (see also: Romans 13:8; 1 Peter 1:22; 1 Peter 3:8; 1 John 3:11; 1 John 3:23; 1 John 4:7; 2 John 1:5)

What do these verses have to tell us about cultivating love in our spiritual walk?

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Central to our theology, then, is giving up our attempts to love. This does not imply a giving up of self-discipline. Much to the contrary, what I am suggesting demands greater self-discipline. However, we choose discipline freely as a response to God's love. The Hilarity of God's immense grace for us makes us *want* to grow to be more loving and to love without hypocrisy. (Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12*, 146)

By logical syllogism we deduce a very important fact. If a person is not loving, John says, he or she does not know God. How will that individual become more loving, then? Can we grow in love by trying to love more? No, our attempts to love will only end in more frustration and less love. The solution, John implies, is to know God better. This is so simple that we miss it all the time: our means for becoming more loving is to know God better. (Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12*, 146)

This quote (and I believe it is accurate) is huge. What are your thoughts? How are these two above quotes counter to most 21<sup>st</sup> Century Americans preaching?

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## **XI. Community to cultivate perspective:**

READ: Romans 15:14

What does this verse have to tell us about cultivating a fresh perspective on life through Christian community in our spiritual walk?

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I will never again make a major decision alone. Certainly God's will can be more clearly perceived when many hearts are attuned to the Holy Spirit. One of my major goals in seeking to strengthen the Christian community is to bring back to other denominations this gift of mutual decision making and mutual searching for God's will—so that we may discover the Hilarity of testing and approving it together. (Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12*, 54)

This comment above by Marva Dawn sounds foreign to our modern ears. But, what advantages could we glean if in fact, we were able to implement the counsel given above?

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We cannot see God's light alone. We need the Christian community to incarnate it for us. Similarly, our Joys are too great to hold within ourselves. The old saying that shared Grievs are halved and shared Joys are doubled certainly is true within the Hilarity of the Christian community. (Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12*, 241)

Thoughts?

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Notice this paradox: God's love is unknowable in its infinity, and yet we can know it because we actually become filled with it! Ephesians describes it in four dimensions (wide, long, high, and deep) even though we live in a three-dimensional world. This use of four terms carries us beyond the sphere of human experience into a love that transcends the natural. Thus, we know this love powerfully and supernaturally because we recognize it in ourselves and because, "together with all the saints," we experience it Hilariously in community. (Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12*, 145)

What do you think this quote is saying?

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If we do not move in divine forgiveness, we will walk in much deception. We will presume we have discernment when, in truth, we are seeing through the veil of a critical spirit. We must know our weaknesses, for if we are blind to our sins, what we assume we discern in men will merely be the reflection of ourselves. Indeed, if we do not move in love, we will actually become a menace to the body of Christ (Matthew 7:1-5). (Francis Frangipane, *The Three Battlegrounds*, 75)

Thoughts?

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No matter how you see God, you do not see all of him. We need each other to complete the fullness of Christ. We need what we lack in order for the body of Christ to be balanced and healthy. Be the man or woman of God he has made you to be, understanding that what you offer through your personal style is needed but is not complete. (Bruce Bugbee, *What You Do Best in the Body of Christ*, 79)

Thoughts?

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As we conclude, contemplate the following quotes:

The church is too many times like porcupines on a cold winter night. They want to snuggle because the world is hostile and cold, but they can't stand each other because of the quills. Back and forth they go in a slow religious dance that the world sees in the church as fellowship. We need each other but we needle each other.

John tells us that the proof that we are walking in the light is that we have "fellowship with one another" (1 John 1:7). If you're not having regular fellowship with other believers you should

seriously question whether or not you are really walking in the light. (Rick Warren; *The Purpose Driven Church*, 339)

How often we have tried somehow to love somebody that we can't stand! The harder we try to love, the more difficult it becomes. We get super-frustrated and angry at the other person for making love so difficult. All our human efforts to try to love others are bound to fail because the more we put ourselves under a performance principle, the more our failures make us feel guilty and cause us to love less. This is the corollary to the central message of God's freeing love throughout the discourse of the book of Romans: that all human efforts, all performance principles, will only bring failure and despair. Only when we are set free from the demands of the law can we discover the Hilarity of living in love through faith. (Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12*, 145-45)

The Holy Spirit is intimate with God's people, calling them to God (Isaiah 61:1); teaching (John 14:26); bestowing salvation (John 3:5-8); giving faith, knowledge, wisdom and understanding (Isaiah 11:2; 1 Corinthians 2:14-16; 12:9); sustaining (Psalm 51:10-12); giving assurance of God's love and salvation (Romans 8:12-17); and reminding them of heaven (Romans 5:2, 5; Ephesians 1:13-14; Revelation 22:17).

In the corporate manifestation of God's Spirit, we see Him doing the work of unifying believers with Christ and each other (1 Corinthians 12:12-13; Ephesians 4:1-6); transforming them (2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:16-25); granting gifts that build up the church, the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4:7-16); giving the church wise plans (Acts 8:29; 13:2; 15:28); empowering the church in an effective witness (Acts 8:29; 1 Corinthians 2:4-5; Ephesians 6:18-20); giving Scripture and prophecy (2 Timothy 3:16-17; Joel 2:28-32); molding the church and individual believers to holiness and sanctification (2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:16-25; Ephesians 5:26-27 [implied]); and always pointing to Christ, the Head of the church (John 15:26-27; Ephesians 3:2-6). (Steve Brown; *Follow the Wind—Our Lord, The Holy Spirit*, 24)

So I use the word *Hilarity* to describe the ideal Christian community, and my intention is to make us stop and think: what would it be like if the Christian Church were truly a community that thoroughly enjoyed being itself? It seems to me it could change the world! (Marva J. Dawn, *Truly the Community: Romans 12*, xi)

How can we be more intentional in our building community for mutual support and encouragement as we grow in grace?

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## Confession as a *Means of Grace*

This is a means of grace which has fallen out of use in both the protestant and catholic church. It has been regarded as a sort of theological or ecclesiastical dinosaur. Something that might have been important and useful in its time but is no longer necessary or needed for the Church to become strong, mature and lacking in nothing.

But, I would like to submit that our failure to take the Scriptures seriously in this area of our spiritual pilgrimage, is the very reason we see so much spiritual apathy, shallowness and immaturity.

**Webster Dictionary** defines confess: “To tell of or make known. An acknowledgment of one’s sins to God or a priest.

**The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament** gives the following as a definition of confess (Gk *homologia*): “to assure, to promise, to admit, to concede, to bear witness, to make solemn statements of faith or to confess something in faith. To agree on the statement” (pgs. 199-200). The goal is a life of inner resolution under the direction of the *logos* (p. 201).

The Discipline of confession helps the believer to grow into “mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph 4:13).

“But isn’t confession a grace instead of a Discipline?” It is both. Unless God gives the grace, no genuine confession can be made. But it is also a Discipline because there are things we must do. It is a consciously chosen course of action that brings us under the shadow of the Almighty. (Richard J. Foster; *Celebration of Discipline*, p. 145)

Confession is a difficult Discipline for us because we all too often view the believing community as a fellowship of saints before we see it as a fellowship of sinners. We feel that everyone else has advanced so far into holiness that we are isolated and alone in our sin. We cannot bear to reveal our failures and shortcomings to others. We imagine that we are the only ones who have not stepped onto the high road to heaven. Therefore, we hide ourselves from one another and live in veiled lies and hypocrisy. (Richard J. Foster; *Celebration of Discipline*, p. 145)

Thoughts about Foster’s comments on confession:

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The only people God forgives are those who confess their guilt.—anonymous

Confession leads to repentance. Confession means to have the same view towards myself that God has (*homologos*). I agree with God that I need help and need to turn things around in my life. — Steve Brown

What insights does Steve Brown’s definition of confession give you?

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Let’s not forget the words of group gossip, that “Protestant confessional,” as Charles Fairbanks put it, where people confess their neighbors’ sin instead of their own. (Cornelius Plantinga, Jr.; *Assurances of the Heart*, p. 231)

What is so painfully true about this quote? Why do you think most churches are this way . . . where gossip is the “Protestant confessional”?

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**The Pentateuch’s (Law of God) Model of Confession:**

READ: Leviticus 5:5; 16:21; Numbers 5:5-7

Why do you think God desires for us to confess our sins to Him?

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Looking at these verses from the Pentateuch, what result was to take place after one confessed his sin?

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The Leviticus 16:21 passage is especially instructive. What do you think God wished to communicate by having a goat vicariously receive the confession and then be sent away into the desert?

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What other insights do you glean from these verses?

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**The Writings** (Wisdom Literature of the Bible) **Model of Confession:**

READ: Psalm 32:5; 38:18; Proverbs 28:13

What does the Psalmist seem to be concerned about in these verses about confession?

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What other insights do you glean from these verses?

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**Solomon's Model of Confession:**

READ: 2 Chronicles 6:22-39

Why do you think Solomon went to such lengths to delineate all the sins that God's people should be willing to confess in the temple to God?

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What does this say to us about the extent of God's willingness to forgive?

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**Ezra's Model of Confession:**

READ: Ezra 10:1-12

What is going on in this passage?

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What is Ezra attempting to do here? Why is this significant to us?

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What was the end result?

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Ezra could have protested his innocence, but like the servant in Isaiah 53:12 he was impelled to reckon himself ‘numbered with the transgressors’, more deeply *ashamed* of the national *guilt* than any of them, and thus more fit to be their spokesman in confession. (Derrick Kidner; *EZRA - NEHEMIAH*, pgs 68-69)

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What is the modern day application of this passage from Ezra 10?

**Daniel’s Model of Confession:**

In my studies for my doctoral dissertation, I spent a lot of time contemplating this passage of Scripture. I find it both convicting and refreshing. Spend much time reading, re-reading and meditating upon Daniel’s message, perspective and attitude in this passage and I am convinced you will reap many rich spiritual rewards.

READ: Daniel 9:1-23

What strikes you about his passage of Scripture?

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What is going on in this passage?



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What is Daniel's position or attitude before God as he prays?

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What is Daniel's understanding of God? Why is this significant to us?

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What is Daniel's understanding of himself and the nation of Israel? Why is this significant to us?

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What was the end result?

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When a man is found confessing what is not wholly his responsibility, something for which many others are responsible as well as himself; when he is confessing it as though it is his sin, that is identification; and when it is confession of this kind, it is acknowledgment, and it is repentance. So I think we may speak of this as the feature of confession. If we were using a phrase instead of a word, we would speak of vicarious repentance, repenting in the behalf of others. But confession is sufficient, it carries with all that.

We have tried to tell ourselves in this message that we must not regard ourselves as something apart from the rest, some thing that is detached, and that looks on at things in any kind of judging, condemning, critical way, as though we had no part in it; but, being members of one Body, if one member suffers all the members suffer with it, and the suffering is the suffering of the whole Body. With Christ I am quite sure that is true, that He suffers in the measure in which any part of His Body comes short, because He needs the whole Body, in fulness, of the fullness of His expression and realization. So that He suffers, and if the Body is in any part coming short we are suffering in the suffering of Christ. Is not that which the Apostle meant when he said he was filling up that which was lacking of the sufferings of Christ? That is real intercession; prayer of confession and identification. (T. Austin-Sparks; *Nehemiah*, p.35)

Does this quote help you to understand Daniel's position in Daniel 9 as I believe it is much the same as Nehemiah's in Nehemiah chapter 1?

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What is the modern day application of this passage from Daniel 9?

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**John the Baptist's Ministry of Confession:**

READ: Matthew 3:6; Mark 1:5

Why do you think confession was important to John?

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What did the act of confession accomplish in preparing men's and women's hearts to receive the coming Messiah?

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Why is baptism an appropriate sacrament to attach with confession?

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**Early Church's Model of Confession:**

READ: Acts 19:18; James 5:16; 1 John 1:9

What does the Acts 19:18 passage contribute to our understanding of confession?

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What does the James 5:16 passage contribute to our understanding of confession?

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Why do you think God desires for us to confess our sins to another believer?

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What does the 1 John 1:9 passage contribute to our understanding of confession?

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Remorse for sin does have a place in the Christian life, but we should be very sure what function it serves. Guilt should drive us to the cross, but grace must lead us from it. Guilt makes us seek Christ, but gratitude should make us serve him. Guilt should lead to confession, but without a response of love as the motive of renewed obedience, true repentance never matures. (Bryan Chapell; *Holiness by Grace*, p. 192)

Thoughts!

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We do not have enough of God —especially the truth of his wrath in the midst of his love — to experience the exhilarating freedom of confessing our sin and the joyous beauty of forgiveness. (Marva Dawn; *Reaching Out without Dumbing Down*, p 91)

During the Great Awakening, when the Spirit of God revived much of our nation's early faith, Jonathan Edwards was presiding over a massive prayer meeting. 800 men prayed with him. Into that meeting a woman sent a message asking the men to pray for her husband. The note described a man who in spiritual pride had become unloving, prideful, and difficult. Edwards read the message in private and then, thinking that perhaps the man described was present, the great preacher made a bold request. Edwards first read the note to the 800 men. Then he asked if the man who had been described would raise his hand, so that the whole assembly could pray for him.

300 men raised their hands. Each had been convicted by the Spirit of their sin, and now they longed to confess. A repentant life is so characterized. Rather than hiding sin, or minimizing it, or blaming others, the repentant heart longs to confess. (Bryan Chapell; *Holiness by Grace*, p. 81)

Thoughts!

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Content not yourself with confessing your...sins, merely as to the fact, but accuse yourself also of the motive that induced you to commit them. (Francis de Sales, *Introduction to a Devout Life*, p. 107)

### **Dietrich Bonhoeffer on Confession**

In confession the break-through to community takes place. Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community. The more isolated a person is, the more destructive will be the power of sin over him, and the more deeply he becomes involved in it, the more disastrous is his isolation. Sin wants to remain unknown. It shuns the light. In the darkness of the unexpressed it poisons the whole being of a person. This can happen even in the midst of a pious community. In confession the light of the Gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. The sin must be brought into the light. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 112)

The mind and flesh of man are set on fire by pride; for it is precisely in his wickedness that man wants to be as God. Confession in the presence of a brother is the profoundest kind of humiliation. It hurts, it cuts a man down, it is a dreadful blow to pride. To stand there before a brother as a sinner is an ignominy that is almost unbearable. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 114)

Why is it that it is often easier for us to confess our sins to God than to a brother? God is holy and sinless, He is a just judge of evil and the enemy of all disobedience. But a brother is sinful as we are. He knows from his own experience the dark night of secret sin. Why should we not find it easier to go to a brother than to the holy God? But if we do, we must ask ourselves whether we have not often been deceiving ourselves with our confession of sin to God, whether we have not rather been confessing our sins to ourselves and also granting ourselves absolution. And is not the reason perhaps for our countless relapses and the feebleness of our Christian obedience to be found precisely in the fact that we are living on self-forgiveness and not a real forgiveness? Self-forgiveness can never lead to a breach with sin; this can be accomplished only by the judging and pardoning Word of God itself. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 115-16)

A man who confesses his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person. As long as I am

by myself in the confession of my sins everything remains in the dark, but in the presence of a brother the sin has to be brought into the light. But since the sin must come to light some time, it is better that it happens today between me and my brother, rather than on the last day in the piercing light of the final judgment. It is a mercy that we can confess our sins to a brother. Such grace spares us the terrors of the last judgment. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 116)

Anybody who has once been horrified by the dreadfulness of his own sin that nailed Jesus to the Cross will no longer be horrified by even the rankest sins of a brother. Looking at the Cross of Jesus, he knows the human heart. He knows how utterly lost it is in sin and weakness, how it goes astray in the ways of sin, and he also knows that it is accepted in grace and mercy. Only the brother under the Cross can hear a confession. (Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 118)

What role do you think confession plays in Dietrich Bonhoeffer's thinking?

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Do not participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them" (Eph 5:11). When you expose and confess your sins, they no longer are in darkness (secrecy). When light is turned on in a dark room, darkness becomes light. So also, when you bring your sins out of darkness and expose them to light, they vanish in God's forgiveness; they become light. (Francis Frangipane, *The Three Battlegrounds*, p. 113)

A sermon by Tim Keller: Freedom in the Spirit 28:25 into the sermon

"If you want to see another version of "no condemnation" . . . nothing can bring you back under condemnation . . . take a look at this very famous verse that I have heard people use for years. If you are into Scripture memory, it is usually one of the little Scripture memory verses it is in First John, chapter one, eight and nine. And it says, 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.'

'Oh', you say, 'See there. It says, "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Right. Which means that if you sin you are condemned until you confess your sin and then you are forgiven.'

Oh no. Did you listen carefully? That is not the way . . . that might be the way that other religions work, but it is not the way Christianity works. Because it does not say . . . 'If we confess our sins, He is faithful and merciful to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.' He doesn't say He is faithful and merciful to forgive us your sins. He doesn't say, "O Lord, forgive my sins, reconcile with me, cleanse me, and embrace me because of your mercy". I'm not saying that God is not merciful. But that is not what First John is saying.

John is saying He will forgive you your sins, not because of His mercy, but because of

His justice. He will be faithful and just to forgive you your sins.

You know that means? It means that if you are a Christian, and you are in Christ Jesus, and you come and ask for forgiveness (and I have to say this reverently - but it is in the Bible . . . But here it is) It would be utterly unjust for God to NOT to forgive you.

Do you know why?

Because when Jesus Christ stands before the Father as our Advocate and as our High Priest, as the Bible says, He is praying for us.

Well, what is He saying?

Is He saying, "When you sin, and you come and you say, O Lord, please forgive me."

Does Jesus turn to the Father and say, "One more time please. I mean I know this is sin number 835 in the same category this year. But please, out of your mercy Father, please one more time.

That is not what John says He is doing. That is not what Romans 8 indicates He is doing. . . . When it said, That when we sin, and you pray to God, "Please forgive me" . . . Jesus Christ says, "I have paid for it". And therefore, Jesus says in essence, to the Father, "If you do not forgive that sin, you would be getting two payments. And therefore, embrace this sister of mine, embrace this brother of mine, you know why? Because you need to embrace him or her, not out of your mercy now, it was in your mercy that you put me forth as a substitution, it was in your mercy that you put me forth to pay the penalty out of my own life and blood. But now, embrace them out of justice. It would be unjust. Your Law demands payment! I have paid it. Therefore, righteousness, justice, the very law of God demands, and will eternally demand that You embrace this person."

And so you see when you as a Christian go to ask for forgiveness, you are not saying, "Oh Lord, I'm under condemnation, get me out."

When my sons are rude to me, or my wife — when they sin against us; one of the reasons why their rudeness, (in fact, you know rudeness from somebody outside the family isn't all that big a deal. Rudeness from inside the family is. In other words their sins are sins because they are inside, because they are inseparably linked to us. And when they ask for forgiveness, they are not saying, "Please dad, put me back in the will". They know that they are not out. They don't say, "Please dad let me back in the family. You know draw up those papers that make us your legal heirs once again." They know that is not the issue.

They are saying, Dad, because we are inseparably linked to you, it is so wrong for us to be out of fellowship. They are not asking to be brought back into the family, they are asking for renewal of fellowship. And that is what you are supposed to be doing at the very same time.

. . . And if we as flawed parents know that nothing will ever separate our heart, then how in the world is that going to happen to God. There is no condemnation. There is no more condemnation.

Thoughts!

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## Silence or Solitude as a *Means of Grace*

This is a means of grace that needs to be handled with great care and discernment. One of the Creation directives that allow us to gain insight into the heart and thoughts of God is that God declared that Adam was alone and this was not good. And we have already studied Community as a Means of Grace. So, how do we interpret the Scriptures and the voice of the spiritual giants over the centuries who both sing the praises of silence and solitude?

**READ: Gn 2:18**

How do we interpret this verse in the light of the Bible's admonition to seek silence and solitude?

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**READ: Eccl 3:7**

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If silence is golden, not many people can be arrested for hoarding. — E. C. McKenzie

A list of the thirteen virtues Benjamin Franklin tried to practice: Temperance; Silence; Order; Resolution; Frugality; Industry; Sincerity; Justice; Moderation; Cleanliness; Tranquility; Chastity; Humility.

Four spiritual disciplines for gaining spiritual strength:

- 1- Pursuit of solitude and silence
- 2- Regular listening to God
- 3- Experience of reflection and meditation
- 4- Prayer as worship and intercession

(Gordon MacDonald; *Ordering Your Private World*, 126)

Thoughts about the above quotes:

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Now, for most of us Sabbath is first to be achieved in the practice of solitude and silence. These must be carefully sought, cultivated, and dwelt in. When they become established in our soul and our body, they can be practiced in company with others. But the body must be weaned away from its tendencies to always take control, to run the world, to achieve and produce, to attain gratification. These are its habitual tendencies learned in a fallen world. Progress in the opposite direction can only be made in solitude and silence, for they “take our hands off our world” as nothing else does. And that is the meaning of Sabbath. (Dallas Willard; *Renovation of the Heart*, 175)

Most of the activities commonly identified as “religious” activities *can* be a part of the process of spiritual formation, and should be. Public and private worship, study of scripture, nature, and God’s acts in human history, prayer, giving to godly causes, and service to others can all be highly effective elements in spiritual formation. But they must be thoughtfully and resolutely approached for that purpose, or they will have little or no effect in promoting it.

Other less commonly practiced activities, such as fasting, solitude, silence, listening prayer, scripture memorization, frugal living, confession, journaling, submission to the will of others as appropriate, and well-used spiritual direction, are in fact more foundational for spiritual formation in Christ-likeness than the better-known religious practices and are essential for their profitable use. (Dallas Willard; *The Great Omission*, 107)

What insights does Dallas Willard offer that allows us to gain insight into the value of silence and solitude?

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## **Taking a Look at a few of various meanings in the Scriptures’ references to Silence and Solitude:**

**Silence as a time to reflect and comprehend:**

**READ: Dt 27:1-10; 1 Sm 12:12-17; Neh 8:1-11; Ps 46:8-11**

What do these verses tell us about the use of silence as a “*Means of Grace*”?

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*But the things that we hear in solitude and silence must be internalized.* I am writing this book with the technical assistance of a computer and a word processing program. When I first became acquainted with my computer, I had to learn the function of the “enter” key. The teaching manual instructed me that I could type anything I wanted on the screen in front of me. But until I touched the “enter” key, the computer would not “hear” or respond to a single word I had typed. All of my words, no matter how impressive, would just sit on the screen’s surface until I entered them onto the heart (the “memory”) of the computer. (Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World*, 138)

What strikes you about the MacDonald quote above?

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In silence man can most readily preserve his integrity. -Meister Eckhart

**Silence as a time to express humility and remorse:**  
**READ: Job 13:13-19**

What does this verse tell us about the use of silence as a “*Means of Grace*”?

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**Silence as a time to resignation or submission:**

**READ: 1 Sm 10:20-27; Job 12:13-25; 33:31-33; Ps 37:7; 39:9; Eccl 5:2; Isa 41:1-4; Lam 3:25-33; 1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tm 2:11-12.**

What do these verses tell us about the use of silence as a “*Means of Grace*”?

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Yes, it will take great courage to enter the quiet and dismember our distractions. We are spiritually fearful people, and alone before God, we stand naked and vulnerable. We won’t be able to pretend anymore; before God, we will have the choice to obey or to disobey, but pretending will no longer be an option. If we are miserable, we will have to face our misery. If we are sad, we will have to face our sadness. When we dwell in God’s presence, we must dwell in truth; we cannot control the outcome. (Gary L. Thomas, *Seeking the Face of God*, 108)

Thoughts about this quote by Gary Thomas:

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**Silence as a metaphor for death:**

READ: Ps 31:17-18; 63:9-11; Jer 49:26; 50:30; 51:55.

What do these verses tell us about the use of silence as a “*Means of Grace*”?

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**Silence as giving time for nurturing discernment:**

READ: Ps 4:1-5; Amos 5:11-15; Acts 15:12.

What do these verses tell us about the use of silence as a “*Means of Grace*”?

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We live, in fact, in a world starved for solitude, silence, and privacy: and therefore starved for meditation and true friendship. (C. S. Lewis; *Weight of Glory*, p. 31)

**Silence as an expression of contrition:**

READ: Ps 8:1-2; Isa 23:1-5; Lam 2:10; Zep 1:1-9.

What do these verses tell us about the use of silence as a “*Means of Grace*”?

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**Stillness as a sign of respect, awe and humility**

READ: Hab 2:20; Zec 2:13; Mk 1:21-28 & Lk 4:35; Mk 4:39-40; Rom 3:19.

What do these verses tell us about the use of silence as a “*Means of Grace*”?

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**Quiet as a sign or demonstration of peace, contentment and lack of turmoil**

READ: 2 Chr 23:14-21; Isa 30:15; 32:17; Mt 26:63?; 1 Pt 3:4.

What do these verses tell us about the use of silence as a “*Means of Grace*”?

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According to *NEW MAN* magazine, writer, theologian, and one-time Harvard Professor Henri Nouwen once broke away from his busy schedule to live for six months in a monastery. Here is why:

I realized that I was caught in a web of strange paradoxes. While complaining about too many demands, I felt uneasy when none were made. While speaking about the burden of letter writing, an empty mailbox made me sad. While speaking nostalgically about an empty desk, I feared the day in which that would come true.

In short, while desiring to be alone, I was frightened of being left alone. The more I became aware of these paradoxes, the more I started to see how much I had fallen in love with my own compulsions and illusions, and how much I need to step back and wonder, “Is there a quiet stream underneath the fluctuating affirmations and rejections of my little world?”

That quiet stream of contentment, of course, is found only in the Lord. And periods of solitude with him can be crucial to finding it. (Craig Brian Larson ed., *Choice Contemporary Stories & illustrations for Preachers, Teachers and Writers*, 249)

The sole cause of man’s unhappiness is that he does not know how to stay quietly in his room. — Blaise Pascal

I found the above two quotes both thought provoking and at the same time disturbing. How did you respond after reading and contemplating the message of these two quotes?

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**Silence as a sign of one’s rebellion or stupidity in that one is caught in his error without a response but refuses to repent:**

**READ: 1 Sm 2:6-10; Mt 22:23-36; Mk 3:4; 9:33-34; Lk 14:1-6; 20:1-26; 1 Pt 2:15.**

What do these verses tell us about the use of silence as a “*Means of Grace*”?

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Silence is not always a sign of wisdom, but babbling is ever folly. -Benjamin Franklin

Even a fish stays out of trouble if it keeps its mouth shut.

It is better to remain silent and appear a fool, than to open your mouth and remove all doubt.

Silence is golden when you can’t think of a good answer. -Muhammad Ali

Thoughts!

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**Solitude as an opportunity to minimize distractions and to anticipate hearing from (O)ne who knows:**

READ: Job 29:21; Mt 14:23; Mk 1:35; 6:30-32, 9:2; Lk 4:42; 5:15-16;

What do these verses tell us about the use of silence as a “*Means of Grace*”?

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F. B. Meyer wrote of John the Baptist:

Fatherless, motherless, brotherless, sisterless, a lone man he passed forth into the great wilderness of Judea which was so desolate that the Jews called it the abomination of desolation. Travelers who have passed over and through it say that, “It is destitute of all animal life save a chance vulture or fox. For the most part it is a waste of sand swept by wild winds.

When Jesus was there some two or three years later he found nothing to eat. The stones around mocked his hunger and there was no company save that of the wild beasts.

In this great and terrible wilderness John supported himself by eating locusts and wild honey which abounded in the crevices of the rocks. While for clothing he was content with a coat of course camel’s hair such as the Arab women still make, and a girdle of skin about his loins. A cave like that in which David and his men often found refuge sufficed him for a home and the water of the stream that hurried to the Dead Sea his beverage.

Can we wonder that under such a regiment he grew strong? We become weak by continual contact with our fellows. We sink to their level. We accommodate ourselves to their fashions and whims. We limit the natural developments of character on God’s plan. We take on the color of the bottom on which we lie.

But in loneliness and solitude, wherein we meet God, we become strong. (Taken from the Chuck Swindoll tape series **The Origination of Something Glorious: Luke 1:1-6:49**, tape #3, side A, Luke 1:57-80; *The Prophet of the Most High*)

“The individual who has experienced solitude will not easily become a victim of mass suggestion.” — Albert Einstein

Thoughts!

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The word listen - contains the same letters as the word silent.

From "Searching for the Divine" by Vince Rause (*Reader's Digest* 12/01, 145)

"My salvation is to hear and respond," wrote Thomas Merton, a Trappist monk. "For this, my life must be silent. Hence, my silence is my salvation."

And that, I've decided, is my new master plan: To forget about being informed or interesting or rational. To just shut up and listen for a while.

Religion is what you do with your solitude. — Arch Bishop William Temple

Other thoughts?

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