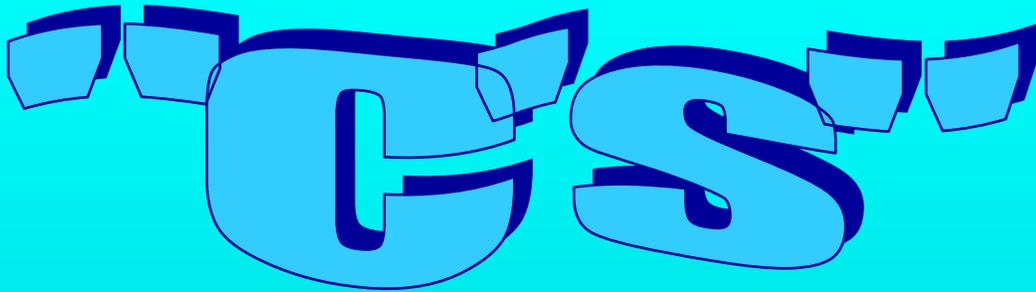


The 13



Of

***SUCCESSFUL
CHRISTIAN
LIVING***

12 lessons

Prepared by:

PAUL E. CANTRELL

2004

The 13

“C’S”

of

**SUCCESSFUL
CHRISTIAN
LIVING**

13 Lessons

**Prepared by:
PAUL E. CANTRELL
84 Northview Drive
Mechanicsburg, PA 17050**

pecantrell@juno.com

2004

CONTENTS

"13 C's of Successful Christian Living"

Lessons	Topics	Pages
1 --	A Life of Commitment	1-3
2 --	A Life of Confidence	4-7
3 --	A Life of Constancy (Persistence)	8-10
4 --	A Life of Contentment	11-13
5 --	A Life of Character	14-16
6 --	A Life of Challenge	17-19
7 --	A Life of Cheerfulness	20-22
8 --	A Life of Caring	23-24
9 --	A Life of Control	25-27
10 --	A Life of Change	28-29
11 --	A Captivating Life	30-31
12 --	A Life With A Crown	32-35
13 --	A Challenge to Believe	36-39

Lesson One

A Life of Commitment

INTRODUCTION

1. When you talk about Loyalty & Commitment—Ruth is a prime example of such.
 - a) She was willing to leave her family & homeland.
 - b) To go and live among strange people with different customs & beliefs.
 - c) And be committed to Naomi, her people, and her God. (Ruth 1:15-17)
2. Commitment is an important principle in every area of life!
 - a) The automobile manufacturers say they are *"committed to excellence."*
 - b) Professional athletes are committed to be the very best they can be.
 - c) People can be committed to their job, their company, their community.
 - d) And even to the Lord & his church.
 - e) We are convinced that commitment is foundational to a successful Christian life.
3. To some, Commitment in marriage is like a trap:
 - a) Suffocating to the one that wants to get out.
 - b) Like being in bondage to something that is failing.
 - c) Yet, there is nothing more important in marriage than a determination that it should last.
4. In a survey of 186 couples:
 - a) Commitment was one of the top 3 things listed that make for strong & lasting marriages.
 - b) *"A commitment to stay married settles it and allows no other choice."*
 - c) It means that Divorce is out of the question.
5. If Commitment is important in marriage, it definitely is in living the Christian Life

DISCUSSION

I. HOW WOULD YOU DEFINE COMMITMENT?

A. Defined:

- 1) *"To bring together"*
- 2) *"To join together"*
- 3) *"To entrust one's self to someone or something"*
- 4) *"Put one's self in another's hands"*
- 5) *"Pledging of one's self to another"*
- 6) *"It is to promise to do something and keep it."*

B. Illustrated:

- 1) Ruth made a promise to Noami and kept it.
- 2) God is committed to His promises.
 - a) Heb. 10:23—*"Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful."*
 - b) 1 Pet. 2:23—*"Who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously."*
 - c) Jesus committed Himself to the will of God.
- 3) Timothy was told to "commit" or "entrust" the Word of God to others.

- a) 2 Tim. 2:2—"*And the things that you have heard from me among many witnesses, commit these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*"
- 4) Men can commit their ways to sinfulness.
 - a) John 8:34—"*Jesus answered them, 'Most assuredly, I say to you, whoever commits sin is a slave of sin.'*"
- C. *We are encouraged to commit our ways to the Lord.*
 - 1) Ps. 37:5—"*Commit your way to the Lord, Trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.*"
 - 2) 1 Pet. 4:19—"*Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator.*"

II. WE SHOULD BE COMMITTED TO LIVING THE CHRISTIAN LIFE!

A. Illustrated:

- 1) A photographer was asked to make a duplicate picture of a boy's girl friend.
- 2) He noticed this inscription on the back: "*My dearest Tom, I love you with all my heart. I love you more and more each day. I will love you forever and ever. I am yours for all eternity.*" Signed, "*Dianne.*"
"P.S. If we ever break up, I want this picture back."
- 3) That is commitment??

B. Illustrated:

- 1) A President of a Bible College was faced with a momentous decision.
 - a) His wife had contacted Alzheimer's disease.
 - b) It had gotten so bad that he could no longer continue as President if he took care of his wife.
- 2) His closest friends advised him to:
 - a) Put her in an institution to be cared for.
 - b) And he could continue on in his work.
 - c) Besides, he was only 57.
- 3) But he made the decision to resign & spend his time caring for his wife.
 - a) He had committed himself to her 42 years ago—in sickness & in health—to love, honor and cherish.
 - b) It was a matter of integrity with him.
- 4) He later wrote of the joys and blessings he had received as a result of the special time spent with his wife.

C. To be a Christian is the choice that I make!

- 1) We need to stick with our choices that we make, unless they were made wrong.
- 2) Jesus said: "*No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*" (Luke 9:62)

D. We show our integrity by our commitment.

- 1) We have considered the cost of discipleship and made the commitment to stay with it. (Luke 9:23-25; 14:27-33)
- 2) It is a promise that is sacred before God & others—and I will keep it!
- 3) It is to hold steady when the temptation is to run from a difficult situation or relationship.

- 4) It gives staying power to preserve my relationship with God
- 5) Jesus condemned the Scribes by saying: ***“do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do.”*** (Matt. 23:3)

III. WHAT DOES COMMITMENT REQUIRE?

A. Trustworthiness.

- 1) Lack of trust is learned by children.
- 2) Illustration:
 - a) Father with a 3-year-old.
 - b) Stood him on a table and said, "Jump, and I'll catch you."
 - c) Did it three times and all three times the father did not catch him.
 - d) *"Now son, learn a lesson—trust no one."*
- 3) Illustration:
 - a) This is the reason why "Unfaithfulness" on the part of a mate is so devastating.
 - b) They destroyed the trust that had been built between them.
- 4) But what about our trustworthiness to God?
 - a) Do we show our trustworthiness by our actions? (Jas. 2:21-24)
 - b) Is our word good?
 - c) Can God truly trust us?

B. Endurance.

- 1) To endure, infers that there are hardships to go through to remain committed.
- 2) Love helps us to endure (1 Cor. 13:4, 7).
- 3) Our hope helps us to stay committed (Rom. 8:24-25).
- 4) Jesus' example of commitment to the end should be a source of strength for us (Matt. 26:39).
- 5) On the cross He could say, ***“It is finished (completed)”*** (Jn. 19:30)

CONCLUSION

1. There should be no P.S. in marriage—*“If this breaks up, I want my picture back.”*
 - a) It is for life—we made a commitment to that end—we need to keep it.
 - b) But hopefully for a richer life.
2. Neither should there be a P.S. in our commitment to serve God.
 - a) We belong to & have committed our lives to follow Christ.
 - b) It is a commitment for life—until death. (Rev. 2:10)
 - c) We must never turn our back on Him.
 - d) He never will on us.

Lesson Two

A Life of Confidence

INTRODUCTION

1. Positive Christian Living requires a “Life of Confidence.”
2. But...Confident Living does not come easy!
 - a) It is not something one is born with, but developed.
 - b) Some may have a harder time developing such in their lives.
 - 1) Their parents may have been perfectionists or over-demanding.
 - 2) May not have shown their love and appreciation sufficiently.
 - 3) May have had good intentions, but wrong methods!
 - c) However, all can live confidently in Christ Jesus....if we set our minds to the task.
3. What are some indications of a lack of confidence?
 - a) Personal frustration & unhappiness.
 - b) Shyness that causes me to stay in the background.
 - c) Fearfulness and insecurity.
 - d) Self-consciousness and being ill-at-ease.
 - e) Uncertainty of self.
 - f) Failure...discouragement.
 - g) Feeling of unworthiness.
 - h) Questioning & doubting God’s love and providence & care over me.
 - i) Bad outlook about myself.
4. How can I develop this life of confidence?

DISCUSSION

I. I MUST DEVELOP A HEALTHY VIEW OF MYSELF!

- A. If I over-rate myself...I become proud, arrogant, haughty, conceited.**
 - 1) Such is condemned severely in God’s Word!
 - 2) Jas. 4:6—*“God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble.”*
 - 3) Rom. 12:3—*“Not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”*
- B. But also....I must not under-rate myself!**
 - 1) I then become a shirker, irresponsible, cowardly, shy, fearful, insecure, etc.
 - 2) My inferiority complex and self-doubt will cut deep scars into my personality.
 - 3) I will have:
 - a) Feelings of inadequacy; worthlessness; & failure;
 - b) Feelings of dislike for myself and everything about me;
 - c) Feelings of self-pity & feeling sorry for myself
 - 4) This could lead to depression, and even taking of my life!
 - 5) 2 Tim. 1:7—*“For God has not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound(healthy) mind.”*
 - 6) Rev. 21:8—*“But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars,*

shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.”

C. God wants to help us have a good, healthy, vital image & outlook of ourselves!

- 1) God's whole approach towards man shows how he views us:
 - a) He created us in His image & called us very good. (Gen. 1:26, 31)
 - b) He gave us pre-eminence over all things on earth. (Gen. 1:28)
 - c) Even after man rebelled against Him, He loved us. (John 3:16)
 - d) The sending of His Son to redeem us proves our worth in His eyes.
 - e) He tells us...even the hairs of our head are numbered. (Matt. 10:30)
- 2) Then, special privileges are given to those who become His children:
 - a) He places us in His church or Kingdom. (Col. 1:13-14)
 - b) His Holy Spirit dwells in us. (I Cor. 6:19)
 - c) We have the privilege of approaching God in prayer through our Redeemer, Christ. (Heb. 4:16)
 - d) God has made us to become kings & priests. (Rev. 1:6)
 - e) He has given me great & challenging purposes for living:
 - 1—We are useful like salt & light. (Matt. 5:13-16)
 - 2—We have a great message for a lost world. (Mk. 16:15)
 - f) He has an inheritance for me that is immeasurable. (1 Pet. 1:3-4)
 - g) He has promised provisions for my earthly life. (Matt. 6:33)
 - h) He has promised provisions for my eternal life. (Matt. 25:46)

D. When I see myself as God sees me:

- 1) I will have a good, healthy self-respect.
- 2) I will realize that “God does not make inferior products.”
- 3) My confidence for living triumphantly will be greatly enlarged!

II. I MUST DEVELOP MY SKILLS

A. Greater knowledge, more experience, greater competence will develop Confident Living.

- 1) Illustration:
 - a) During WW-I, the machine guns would often jam on airplanes.
 - b) One pilot had learned to spend the evening before loading his own gun...one bullet at a time.
 - c) Such gave him greater confidence the next day in battle.
- 2) Illustration:
 - a) Young lady who wanted to teach others about Christ.
 - b) But...she lacked confidence.
 - c) She happened to see an advertisement about a Bible Course by correspondence surveying the Bible.
 - d) She took it...and another...and another.
 - e) All the time she was increasing her knowledge of the Bible.
 - f) And her confidence in teaching others increased greatly.
- 3) Knowledge, experience, competency brings great confidence in what we do.
- 4) And brings greater usefulness...and greater happiness!
- 5) 2 Pet. 3:18—***“But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*** Why???

B. The apostle Paul was able to live confidently!

- 1) Phil. 4:13—***“I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me.”***
 - a) When did he say this?
 - b) Not at the beginning of his Christian life.
 - c) It was after he had endured many things, and was then in prison.
 - d) His knowledge, experience, faith had developed.
 - e) Then, he could confidently state.... ***“I can do all things....”***
- 2) 2 Tim. 4:6-8—***“I am now ready to be offered....I have fought a good fight....Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness...”***
 - a) But when did he say this?
 - b) At the end of a long life of service to God.
 - c) His confidence was unshakeable.
 - d) It can be developed!
- 3) Paul was not always this confident in his life.
 - a) 1 Cor. 2:3—***“I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.”***

C. If we expect to be confident in our lives, we need to:

- 1) Develop our knowledge,
- 2) Develop our competency,
- 3) And profit by our experiences!

III. I MUST LEARN TO FACE & DEAL WITH: Fear, Failure, Discouragement, Disappointment, & Frustration.

A. Why do such things come?

- 1) Because of physical illness.
- 2) Death of a loved one.
- 3) Material losses.
- 4) Sense of insecurity.
- 5) Friends turning on me.
- 6) Blighted hopes and dreams.
- 7) Handicaps....etc.

B. How do I deal with these things?

- 1) Try to forget self & reach outward.
 - a) Gal. 6:2—***“Bear ye one another burdens, and so fulfill the Law of Christ.”***
- 2) 1 Pet. 5:7—***“Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you.”***
- 3) Realize burdens can be a blessing from God.
 - a) Jas. 1:1-3
 - b) Burdens can be bridges to greater things.
- 4) Talk to ourselves:
 - a) ***“I am not a failure, I can succeed!”***
 - b) ***“People do care about me and God cares too.”***
 - c) ***“I have a vital role to play in life.”.....Etc.***
- 5) Build our optimism.
 - a) Consider how useless we are when discouraged.
 - b) Pray for God’s help to be optimistic....believing!

- c) Ask for help from fellow-Christians, as well.
- 6) Illustration:
 - a) Article about a woman in an iron curtain country.
 - b) She was a Christian, living with her son-in-law...who was an atheist.
 - c) She was trying to teach her granddaughter about Jesus.
 - d) He resented it, beat her, kicked her out.
 - e) Her final days were lived by herself in a one room apt.
 - f) The way she fought her discouragement was:
 - 1—Praying constantly to God for strength;
 - 2—Constantly reminding herself of God's promises;
 - 3—Especially of her hope of heaven!
- 7) We must never let up!
 - a) We must endure to the end.
 - b) Rev. 2:10

C. If I am to live confidently, I must deal with these things that try to undermine my confidence.

- 1) If I do not, I can never develop confident living.
- 2) I will always be pulled down.

CONCLUSION

- 1. The SENSE of Confident living has to be developed deep down inside of us.
 - a) Jesus reminds us of this concept!
 - b) He said it is not the things that go into the mouth that defiles us, destroys us.
 - c) It is the things that come out of the mouth from the heart that defiles or destroys us.
- 2. But if the right things are placed in our hearts.....That which comes out does not defile or destroy us, but strengthens us!
- 3. Paul's statements showed maturity & confident living when he said:
 - a) ***"I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me."***
 - b) ***"Nothing can separate me from the love of Christ..."***
 - c) ***"I am now ready to be offered, I have finished my course, I have a crown of righteousness awaiting me..."***
- 4. Can we state such things with confidence?
- 5. If not, what are we doing to make such possible?

Lesson Three

A Life of Constancy (Persistence)

INTRODUCTION

1. Why did the plant in the stony ground die? (Mark 4:14-20)
 - a) No root—no continuation.
 - b) No endurance qualities.
2. Jesus is indicating that this is the sad picture of many who become Christians.
 - a) They come in with joy—survive for a while—then fall away!
 - b) They fail to learn a great lesson of life—Endurance—Persistence!
 - c) A person:
 - Can have good intentions
 - Can have high goals & desires
 - d) But, without constancy or persistence—they are worthless.
3. Constancy is a must for successful Christian living.
 - a) He. 3:14—*“For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end...”*

DISCUSSION

I. THERE ARE GOOD REASONS FOR EMPHASIZING PERSISTENCE.

A. If life was easy, persistence would pose no problem.

- 1) But life has its challenges—problems—trials & tribulations.
- 2) 2 Thess. 1:4—*“So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that you endure.”*
- 3) In additions to life’s normal tribulations, the Christian faces persecutions as well.
- 4) 2 Tim. 3:12—*“Yes, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.”*

B. These things challenge and test our faith in God.

- 1) Will we give in to doubt?
- 2) Will we let discouragement cause us to fall away?
- 3) Will we let the lure of the easy way cause us to turn away from the straight & narrow way to life?

II. TO SURVIVE, CONSTANCY MUST BE OUR WATCHWORD.

A. No one will survive without it.

B. Its value is illustrated so well in our world.

- 1) Edison’s invention of the light bulb was over a long period of time and after hundreds of unsuccessful efforts.
 - a) His observation—*“Achievement is 2% inspiration and 98% perspiration.”*
 - b) He persisted until he succeeded.
- 2) Abraham Lincoln well illustrates such.
 - a) 1831—He failed in business.

- b) 1832—He was defeated for Legislature.
 - c) 1833—He again failed in business.
 - d) 1834—He was elected to the Legislature.
 - e) 1838—He was defeated for Speaker of the House.
 - f) 1840—He was defeated for Elector.
 - g) 1843—He was defeated for Congress.
 - h) 1846—He was elected to Congress.
 - i) 1848—He was defeated for Congress.
 - j) 1855—He was defeated for Senate.
 - k) 1856—He was defeated for Vice-President.
 - l) 1858—He was defeated for Senate.
 - m) 1860—He was elected to the Presidency.
- 3) Like Abraham Lincoln—We succeed because we are persistent!
 - 4) And we also learn from every disappointment and difficulty.
 - a) Jas. 1:2-4

C. *Constancy is our way of proving we want to succeed!*

- 1) *“Success is like a fickle lady who wants to be pursued!”*
 - a) She questions our sincerity of purpose over and over.
 - b) But if we prove ourselves—endure, persevere, persist—we will have her.
- 2) We are called to be faithful for life. Rev. 2:10
- 3) Nothing will take the place of persistence.
 - a) Talent will not—talented people have failed.
 - b) Genius will not—people of genius have failed.
 - c) Education will not—Educated people have failed.

III. THE BLESSINGS OF CONSTANCY.

A. *Constancy rewards us greatly:*

- 1) It will bring peace because we are faithfully living for God each day.
- 2) It will bring a sense of joy of achievement.
- 3) It will bring continual meaning and purpose for our lives.
- 4) It will produce an amazing knowledge of God’s Word.
- 5) It will make us wiser from our experiences in the light of God’s Word.
- 6) It will bring many opportunities to affect the lives of others for good.

B. *Just imagine the outcome of a life devoted to the following code:*

- 1) I will never give up so long as I know I am doing right.
- 2) I will believe all things will work out for me if I hang on to the end.
- 3) I will be courageous and undismayed in the face of odds.
- 4) I will not permit anyone to intimidate me or deter me from my goal.
- 5) I will fight to overcome all physical handicaps and setbacks.
- 6) I will try again and again and yet again to accomplish what is right.
- 7) I will learn from others who have successfully overcome adversity.
- 8) I will never surrender to discouragement or despair no matter what obstacles may confront me.

CONCLUSION

1. Illustrate:
 - a) After a concert by a pianist, a woman said to her, *"I'd give anything to play as you do."*
 - b) The pianist's answer was to the point: *"No you wouldn't."*
 - c) The lady responded, *"Yes, but I really would like to play as you do."*
 - d) The pianist's then said to her: *"If you really do, then you will have to give time to practice hour after hour, day after day, year after year to succeed."*
2. Humans can do many things in life—if willing to pay the price—persistence!
3. Illustrate:
 - a) The Romans came to the shores & cliffs of Dover to conquer.
 - b) They were repulsed.
 - c) Then, later, they returned again.
 - d) This time to stay.
 - e) They landed—carried supplies to shore—set fire to their boats.
 - f) With great resolution—they went into battle...and won!
4. On the Road to heaven:
 - a) We must burn our bridges--Jesus warns us about looking back—not worthy of Him.
 - b) Have we made the resolve to be persistent as Christians?

Lesson Four

A Life of Contentment

INTRODUCTION

1. Illustration:
 - a) The reign of Ahab, King of Israel, was a bad reign!(1 Kgs. 21:1-16)
 - b) One of tragedies he caused was because of discontent.
 - c) A man named Naboth had a vineyard close to the king's vineyard.
 - d) Ahab saw it and wanted it.
 - e) He had plenty, but was unhappy.
 - f) Naboth said that he could not sell it...no matter what the king offered.
 - g) The king went to his room, unhappy, pouting, wouldn't eat.
 - h) His wife, Jezebel, found a way to get him over his unhappiness.
 - 1) Have Naboth killed.
 - 2) Just take his vineyard!
2. There is no telling how much evil & unhappiness has been caused by man's discontent.!
3. God wants us to avoid both, so he teaches us to be content!
4. The way of Successful Christian Living is a Life of Contentment!

DISCUSSION

I. WHAT IS MEANT BY THE TERM, CONTENTMENT?

A. Defined:

- 1) *"To be free from care because of satisfaction with what is already one's own."*
- 2) Realizing that one's outward conditions do not determine happiness, but rather inward condition of mind & heart!

B. Terms identified with Contentment:

- 1) Satisfaction, Peace of mind, Serenity, Resignation, Cheerfulness.
- 2) Involves the concept of Faith, Trust, Confidence in God.

C. Terms identified with discontent:

- 1) Unrest, Dissatisfaction, Grumbler,
- 2) Censurer, Complainer, Faultfinder,
- 3) Murmurer, Ungratified.

II. WHY DO WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT CONTENTMENT?

A. Because we can't have everything we see, want or desire.

- 1) Quote from Keith Robinson:
"Few, if any of us, have ever engaged in a day to day struggle for the necessities; it is almost impossible for us to relate to the concept of physical need. Our struggle is for the superfluous; food and clothing are the rule, not the exception; they are as natural to us as the air we breathe. Our security is threatened, not by the thought of death by famine or exposure, but by something that might limit our creature comforts. Our chief preoccupation is not

how we are going to provide another meal for our family, but which of the thousands of items available to us are we going to select for this particular meal. Many in America spend more in an attempt to keep their weight down than others in the world has to spend just to keep from starving.”

- 2) We have such abundance, we struggle to decide what to buy next.
- 3) We also have a problem of keeping our priorities straight.
- 4) It becomes a constant struggle for me to remember that ***“Life does not consist in the abundance of what one possesses.”*** (Lk. 12:5)
- 5) Because I can’t have everything I want...It requires that I learn to be content with what I have.

B. Because there will be times of plenty and also times of want!

- 1) The Apostle Paul talked about this:
 - a) *“...whatsoever state I am in”*
 - b) *“...I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound.”*
 - c) *“...to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.”*
- 2) He had learned to be content with both plenty & poverty!

III. WHAT CONTENTMENT IS NOT!

A. It is not indolence or lack of ambition.

- 1) Usually it is the most aggressive & active that are the most content.
- 2) The Apostle Paul was both!
- 3) He certainly wasn’t lazy nor slothful!
- 4) God’s Word warns against indolence. (Prov. 12:27; 19:27)

B. It is not being indifferent to conditions about me.

- 1) Stoicism:
 - a) Not let self become involved with things or people.
 - b) Can’t be disappointed that way!
- 2) But this is not God’s way for man!
- 3) The Apostle was moved by what he saw, witnessed, experienced.
- 4) He did not isolate or insulate himself from things or people.
- 5) He also submitted without complaint to the unavoidable necessities!
- 6) Contentment is-- *“The total enjoyment of God’s good things on one hand, and the enduring of trials and tribulations without murmuring on the other hand.”*

IV. FOUR SUGGESTIONS TO HELP US BE CONTENT.

A. Realize that contentment is the results of teaching & training.

- 1) It comes to those educated in godliness.
- 2) Paul had learned it, while in prison, facing tribulations, persecutions.
- 3) He said, ***“I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.”***
 - a) He had been thrown from the mountain top of abundance to the chasm of being abased.
 - b) He had learned that his hope had to be in something more stable than circumstances of life.
 - c) In someone who could not be moved.

- d) He knew what it was like to be:
 - 1—Worshipped one minute;
 - 2—And the next, to be stoned by the same people.
- 4) Some of the better known persons in our world have triumphed in life...not because of circumstances, but in spite of them!

B. Don't over-rate material possessions.

- 1) "Material abundance is not the abundant life." (Lk. 12:5)
- 2) Illustration:
 - a) Beverly Hills, Calif., has more combined wealth per capita than anywhere in world.
 - b) Are they content?
 - c) 193 Psychiatrists live there (one for every 170 persons).

C. Don't fret over what you do not have.

- 1) Illustration:
 - a) Ahab fretted over a possession he wanted.
 - b) Pouted, refused to eat, etc.
 - c) He wanted something he didn't have.
 - d) He was wealthy, but all he could think about was what he didn't have.
- 2) Many are content until they see something new that a friend has!
 - a) A child is satisfied with a 2-speed bike until a friend gets a 10-speed.
 - b) Adults are the same way!

D. Don't overlook what you do have!

- 1) Contrast what you are with what you might have been without Christ.
- 2) Stop looking at things you don't have, but look at what you do have.
 - a) Regular job, Good food to eat,
 - b) Health, Clothing, shelter, etc.
- 3) Majority of earth's citizens have far less!

CONCLUSION

- 1. Admonition of Scripture:
 - a) Lk. 3:14—*"And the soldiers likewise demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely; and be content with your wages."*
 - b) 1 Tim. 6:8—*"And having food and raiment let us be therewith content."*
 - c) Heb. 13:5—*"....and be content with such things as ye have..."*
 - d) 1 Tim. 6:6—*"But godliness with contentment is great gain."*
- 2. May we truly be able to say from experience with the Apostle Paul....*"I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."*
 - a) Learn to be content in the midst of plenty.
 - b) Be prepared to be content in the midst of want.

Lesson Five

A Life of Character

INTRODUCTION

- 1) Read Dan. 6:1-10
 - a) How did these men know that Daniel would pray to God after the decree was made?
 - b) Did they know that he had character?
 - c) They had seen enough of his life, so they could predict what he would do.
- 2) Words are used in various ways:
 - a) “*That person is a character*” (funny, entertaining, different)
 - b) “*That person has character*” (very desirable & noble qualities)
 - c) “*That person does not show character*” (Poor qualities in his or her life)
- 3) This study is help us see that living the Christian life requires character.

DISCUSSION

I. DEFINING CHARACTER

A. Basic concept:

- 1) Generally, this can be good or bad.
- 2) A person can be a good character or a bad character.
- 3) Defined as:
 - a) The real person
 - b) The true state or condition of a person.
 - c) The heart and soul of a person.
 - d) The truth about the person.
 - e) The real you...without all the frills!
- 4) Some have tried to distinguish between character & personality in this way:
 - a) Character is the real you.
 - b) Personality is what we try to make people think we are.
 - c) Personality can often hide a weak character for a while.
 - d) Depends upon how genuine we are.

B. The Desirable concept:

- 1) Character is what God wants us to have or possess.
- 2) It is those desirable qualities or traits in one's life.
- 3) The sum total of the good qualities in one's life. (1 Pet. 3:1-4)
 - a) Encouraged women to have kind of qualities pleasing to God.
 - b) Such would have the best effect upon others about us.

II. QUALITIES OF A NOBLE OR GOOD CHARACTER

A. A person of Integrity.

- 1) **Honesty (Eph. 4:25).**
 - a) His word is his bond.
 - b) He stands behind what he says.
 - c) He does not go back on a deal.
 - d) He does not lie or deceive others.
 - e) He pays his bills....takes care of his debts.

- f) Rom. 13:6-8
- g) He does not cheat or steal.
- h) Guile & falsehood are offensive to him.
- 2) **Sincere (Phil. 1:10).**
 - a) *"I am who I am"*
 - b) Not a hypocrite...not a put on.
- 3) **Blameless (Phil. 2:15).**
 - a) Not one who is perfect.
 - b) One who deals with sin in his life.
 - c) One who is truly striving to live right.
- 4) **Illustration:**
 - a) Young man wanted counsel from an older man.
 - b) Older man stated...he had two questions to ask him.
 - c) *"Suppose you would never be found out and no one would be harmed, at least not in any physical way. If these circumstances were guaranteed, would you tell a lie for \$1000.00?"*
 - d) Young man thought a minute and said: *"Yes!"*
 - e) *"Then, would you tell that lie for a dime?"*
 - f) Furious, the young man said: *"Of course not! What do you think I am?"*
 - g) The older man said: *"I already know what you are. I am now trying to establish your price."*
- 5) One measure of a person's integrity is what he would do if he knew he couldn't be found out!
- 6) We only have integrity when we allow God's truth to rule our lives!

B. Dependability (1 Tim. 3:10).

- 1) One who possesses a sense of duty.
- 2) Daniel had a sense of duty to pray to God.
- 3) He continued doing it in spite of the dangers involved.
- 4) This kind of person can be counted on through "think & thin."
- 5) Give them a job....it will be done to the best they can do.
- 6) The passage deals with appointing men to be deacons.
 - a) They are to be proven.
 - b) They have shown their character.
 - c) They have passed the test of their character.

C. A person of moral purity (Heb. 5:14).

- 1) Has strong moral qualities.
- 2) The stamp upon our souls from the choices made between good & evil.
- 3) Making right choices & sticking with them.
- 4) Shown by their speech (Eph. 4:29).
- 5) Shown by course of action in face of temptation like Joseph (Gen. 39:10-12).
- 6) Shown by the way we dress (1 Tim. 2:9).

D. In Summary:

- 1) It is developing those traits that God gives us to follow.
- 2) God gives the direction—goals—ideals—traits.
- 3) But we make the choices that determine our character.

- 4) Character building is like a man building a brick wall:
 - a) We lay one brick at a time until the wall is built.
 - b) We add character traits to our lives one at a time.
 - c) All together...makes up our character.
- 5) The test of the brick wall...whether it will stand up under wind.
- 6) Test of our character...whether we can stand up under trials.....temptations!
- 7) Acts 5:27-29

CONCLUSION

- 1) Daniel, Joseph, the apostles had character!
- 2) Significant fact...man's character is all he takes with him out of this world.
 - a) This is what he is...what he has accomplished.
 - b) With it...he stands before God in judgment.
- 3) In the judgment...it is not WHO we are...but WHAT we are that will count.
- 4) Are we developing a righteous, godly character?
- 5) Will our character stand the test of trials & temptations?
- 6) What about in the day of judgment?

Lesson Six

A Life of Challenge

INTRODUCTION

- 1) Living in this world of Sin, Sorrow, Sickness & Suffering is a **Challenge!**
 - a) God created a world filled with danger, tragedy, and challenges!
 - b) We can either:
 - Shrink from the challenges of life because they are difficult;
 - Or, face life realistically and be strong and learn how to surmount our difficulties.
 - c) We can either:
 - Give up on life, marriage, our job, our health, our friends...and even God;
 - Or, use all of our energies and resources in creative living!
- 2) The Christian life is even more of a challenge!
 - a) Christians are challenged not to live like the majority of people in the world.
(In darkness, wickedness, sin, and rebellion)
 - b) But, to live in light, truth, and righteousness.
 - c) To not give in to the pressures and problems of life, but to be overcomers.
 - d) It is a contrast between:
 - The broad way that leads to destruction;
 - Or, the strait & narrow way that leads to life.
- 3) The Christian life cannot be lived successfully without meeting the challenges placed before us.

DISCUSSION

I. WHY HAS GOD CREATED SUCH A WORLD FOR US TO LIVE IN?

A. The Question "Why" is critical to mankind!

- 1) "Why am I here?"
- 2) "Why am I made like I am made?"
- 3) "Why does God allow sin, sickness, suffering, death, etc.?"
- 4) "Why me, Lord?"

B. Just why has God created our world as a challenge for man to live in?

- 1) The only answer that can be given—"*For the good of mankind!*"
 - a) God is loving, kind, merciful, and full of grace toward us.
 - b) He does not intentionally do things to hurt or harm mankind just for the sake of hurting & harming.
 - c) A God who would give up His only begotten Son to die for us surely has purpose in such a world for man to live in.
- 2) What would life be like without a challenge?
 - a) Old saying—"*Variety is the spice of life.*"
 - b) How could we fully appreciate joy, if there was no sorrow?
 - c) How could we fully appreciate beauty, if there was no ugliness?
 - d) How could we fully appreciate Heaven, if there was no threat of Hell?

C. We know why man is here!

- 1) Eccl. 12:13
- 2) Col. 3:17
- 3) Matt. 16:26
- 4) The way that God made the world must be closely related to why man is here?

II. THE VALUE OF A LIFE OF CHALLENGE

A. Job 23:8-10

- 1) Our lives are purified in trials of life.
- 2) As we come through the trials....we should be better persons.
- 3) But, we are caused to evaluate things a little differently.
 - a) 1 Pet. 4:1-2
 - b) It makes us realize what is the more important things in life.
 - c) Col. 3:1-3
 - d) Matt. 6:33

B. James 1:2-4

- 1) Trials of life help to mature us!
 - a) They help us to grow up....face life realistically.
 - b) They bring desired attributes to our lives.
- 2) Heb. 12:7-11
 - a) To give in to life's trials....or give up....brings bitterness, self-pity, and mental & moral failure.
 - b) But to face up to the challenges of life can build character!
 - c) Growth comes from facing & overcoming challenges in life.

C. 2 Cor. 12:7-10

- 1) Trials of life help us to understand how God works in our lives!
 - a) Paul prayed for the thorn to be removed.
 - b) But God sent it for a purpose...for Paul's good.
 - c) When Paul realized why God had sent the thorn...he accepted it.
- 2) In most instances....we have to walk by faith & not by sight!
 - a) We trust in God and go on in the absence of immediate understanding.
 - b) We know that the rain & sun comes upon the just & unjust.
 - c) But we also know....trials come upon both the just & unjust.
- 3) But God has a purpose for things that come into our lives!
 - a) Let's look for such purposes.
 - b) And believe it whether we can fully understand or not.
 - c) God does all things well.
- 4) Let's remember:
 - a) If trials are for a short time or a life-time.....
 - b) They are to be used by God for our good. (Rom. 8:28)

D. 2 Cor. 4:16-18

- 1) The prize is won only after a struggle.
- 2) What is the value of heaven, if it is not a reward for struggling in this life.
 - a) Rom. 8:17

- b) 1 Pet. 4:12-13
- c) Rev. 3:5
- 3) Illustration:
 - a) During great depression—a good man lost his job; exhausted his savings; forfeited his house.
 - b) His grief was made great by the sudden death of his wife.
 - c) All he had left was his faith & it was weakening.
 - d) One day while looking for work, he saw some men doing stonework on a church building.
 - e) One of the men was skillfully chiseling a triangular piece of rock.
 - f) Not seeing where it would fit...he asked the man about it.
 - g) Answer: *“See that little opening up there near the spire...that is where it goes. I’m shaping it down here so it will fit in up there.”*
- 4) Isn’t that what God is doing with us—shaping us down here for the glorious abode after awhile.

CONCLUSION

- 1) What is life without a challenge?
- 2) The challenge of the Christian is:
 - a) 1 Cor. 15:58
 - b) Rev. 2:10
 - c) Joshua 1:6
- 3) In other words:
 - a) Meet the challenges of life head-on.
 - b) Be defiant to them.
 - c) Be daring and face up to them.
 - d) Be strong and brave and don’t let them conquer us.
- 4) Successful Christian living is a life of challenge!

Lesson Seven

A Life of Cheerfulness

INTRODUCTION

- 1) The Christian is commanded to rejoice! (Phil. 4:4-7)
 - a) To rejoice in the Lord always! At all times.....under all circumstances!
 - b) *“How can I rejoice when I have all these problems?”*
 - c) But the command is there...to rejoice!
 - d) And...to live the Christian life successfully:
 - One must learn how to rejoice or be cheerful.....
 - In the midst of life’s trials & tribulations.
- 2) Facing heartaches, sorrows, trials, tribulations of life is a real test for us.
 - a) All of us have or will have problems—sorrows.
 - Things will not always go right at times.
 - Hardships stack up.
 - Life hardly seems worth living, at times!
 - Heartache is a common lot of man.
 - b) But, the Lord said to rejoice!
 - Can we, will we?
 - When things are going good for us—no real test of our faith.
 - It is when things are going bad that really test our faith.
 - c) And, problems come in degrees and at different times.
 - persecuted for righteousness’ sake.
 - Reviled and they will say all manner of evil against you falsely (Matt. 5:10-12)
 - Be made a gazing stock by reproaches & afflictions.
 - Spoiling of our goods
 - A great fight of afflictions
 - Fiery trials
 - Sorrows, Loneliness, Depression, etc.
 - d) But...the Lord said to rejoice always!
- 3) If you just insist on being miserable, then do the following:
 - a) Be suspicious of others.
 - Believe that most people are selfish and dishonest.
 - Look for ulterior motives.
 - Don’t ever give anyone the benefit of a doubt.
 - b) Focus through the wrong end of the telescope.
 - Dwell on the few discomforts, misfortunes, and shortcomings of your life.
 - Don’t dwell on anything that will distract you from your negative and pessimistic outlook.
 - c) Be Selfish.
 - Dwell on yourself, your feelings, your wants, etc.
 - Don’t let others’ feelings or needs intrude upon you.
 - d) Be Dependent.
 - Expect others to be responsible for your situation.
 - Think about what others should do to help you.

- e) Be Narrow in your Concerns.
 - Don't think about your neighbors.
 - Stop doing church work.
 - Stay home....lock your doors to others.
- 4) But....if you want to be obedient to the Lord, then make up your mind to REJOICE!
 - a) Prov. 23:7
 - This tells me I can control my life by what I think.
 - I can be successful or fail....happy or unhappy.
 - It is my choice.
 - b) Rom. 12:2
 - We can be transformed by allowing God to transform our thinking.
 - If your life isn't what you want it to be...then change it...with God's help.
 - Change it by letting God change your mind—you thoughts!

DISCUSSION

I. FIRST, WE ARE TOLD NOT TO WORRY—BE ANXIOUS.

A. Phil. 4:6a

- 1) To empty our minds & hearts of all that is unhealthy & un happy.
- 2) Not to have a negative outlook on life, about my situation.

B. Matt. 6:25-34

- 1) ***“Take no thought”***.....do not worry.
- 2) Do not have anxious thoughts about your needs in life.
- 3) God knows that you need these things.
- 4) If He provides for the birds....how much more for His people.
- 5) Don't add the burden of worry about your problems in life.
- 6) Live one day at a time.

C. It helps to keep a sense of humor.

- 1) A doctor told a patient: *“If you can't take a joke, you'll have to take some medicine.”*
- 2) Prov. 17:22
- 3) It is a fact....that cheerful people resist disease better than glum ones.
- 4) Prov. 15:13, 15

II. SECOND, WE ARE TOLD TO DEPEND UPON GOD.

A. Phil. 4:6

- 1) In everything....by prayer & supplication.
- 2) Let your requests be made known to God.
- 3) 1 Pet. 5:7
- 4) Phil. 4:13
- 5) 1 Cor. 10:13

B. Turning to God shows faith in God

- 1) It is showing that we believe He knows us and our condition.
- 2) That He cares about us.
- 3) That He provides for us.
- 4) But also helps us through the trials of life.

C. Sometimes, we blow our problems out of proportion.

- 1) We think we have problems at time...but fail to see others so much worse.
- 2) A Quarter Master General of the Army tried to estimate the problems that Moses had with some 3 ½ million people traveling through the wilderness.
- 3) Here are some problems:
 - a) It would take 500 tons of food each day to feed them.
 - b) It would take 11,000,000 gallons of water.
 - c) It would take some 4,000 tons of wood to cook for them.
 - d) Every time they camped...25 miles wide...130 miles long.
- 4) Moses and the people had to learn the hard way to depend upon God for their existence.
- 5) If God could take care of this many people together at one time—how about our little problems?

III. THIRD, WE ARE TOLD TO BE GRATEFUL

A. Phil. 4:6

- 1) In the words of the song, “*Count your many blessings.*”
- 2) We may find that we are in the world’s top 10% of fortunate people.
- 3) If we can see how blessed we are...our problems will not seem so great.
- 4) We need to dwell on our blessings, not our trails.
- 5) Because our blessings are numerous.
- 6) Eph. 5:20
 - a) Do we share our blessings?
 - b) Are handicapped people often the most happy?

B. One of the real reasons for gratitude....is the good that comes from trials.

- 1) Ps. 119:71
- 2) Job 23:10
- 3) Rom. 8:17
- 4) Jas. 1:2
- 5) 1 Pet. 4:13
- 6) Heb. 12:11
- 7) 2 Cor. 4:17-18

CONCLUSION

- 1) God commands us to rejoice!
- 2) He has given us ample reasons for rejoicing.
- 3) He has given us help to be able to rejoice.
- 4) Now, the rest is left to our choice...to be happy or unhappy!

Lesson Eight

A Life of Caring

INTRODUCTION

- 1) Jesus said that two great commands summed up the Law & Prophets:
 - a) To Love God with all one's heart, soul, mind & strength;
 - b) And to Love one's neighbor as himself. (Matt. 22:37-40)
- 2) Two thoughts are obvious in the second command:
 - a) One must love himself—understood.
 - b) Then, he is to love his neighbor as he loves himself.
- 3) While it is understood that we must love ourselves—yet, to end there is selfishness!
 - a) Selfishness is defined:
 - “Regard for one's own interest or advantage, with disregard of the interest of others.”
 - “Devoted to, or caring only for self.”
 - “Influenced chiefly by the person's own interest.”
 - b) Unselfishness is defined:
 - “Caring or showing concern for others.”
 - “Puts other's interest ahead of one's own interest.”
 - c) Illustrated:
 - 2 Cor. 8:1-4
 - Gal. 4:13-15
 - Mother hen seeing after her chicks (Matt. 23:37).
 - Even the willingness to die for another (Jesus) (Rom. 5:6-8).
- 4) Our lesson today: **Successful Christian Living: A Life of Caring!**
 - a) Living a life that is unselfish—concerned for others.
 - b) Practice the rule of three: God first, Other's second, and self last.

DISCUSSION

I. HOW DO YOU IDENTIFY A LIFE CHARACTERIZED AS CARING?

A. Scriptures:

- 1) Esteem others better than self (Phil. 2:3).
- 2) Look on things of others (Phil. 2:4).
- 3) Seeks not its own (1 Cor. 13:5).
- 4) Same earnest care (1 Cor. 12:25).
- 5) Not putting a stumbling block before another (Rom. 14:13)
- 6) Destroy not your brother with your meat (Rom. 14:15).
- 7) Things that edify one another (Rom. 14:19).
- 8) Do nothing to cause your brother to stumble (Rom. 14:21).
- 9) Please your neighbor as Christ did (Rom. 15:1-3).

B. Special emphasis in Scriptures:

- 1) Matt. 25:31-46
- 2) Judgment based on caring about others—especially who are in need.

II THINGS INVOLVED IN CARING:

A. Must communicate that we care.

- 1) Must let people know that we care by expressing it.
- 2) By giving praise for their efforts.
- 3) By complimenting them on a job well-done.
- 4) Taking time to talk with, visit with—encouraging words.
- 5) 1 Cor. 13:1-3
 - a) Good deeds, without caring for the person, does not avail.
 - b) Must love, care, show concern for people.

B. Must be more than just words.

- 1) 1 John 3:16-18
- 2) Correct, caring actions shows the sincerity of the words!

C. Must be of service to others.

- 1) Jas. 1:25
- 2) Jas. 1:27
- 3) 1 Tim. 5:8
- 4) Matt. 25:35-36

D. Realize that to be blessed, I must bless others.

- 1) Acts 20:35
- 2) Gal. 6:7-10
- 3) Luke 6:38

CONCLUSION

- 1) The successful life as a Christian is a caring life!
- 2) Just how caring are we towards others?
- 3) Do we communicate that concern to others by our words, actions, lives?
- 4) Are we seriously concerned about being a caring person?

Lesson Nine

A Life of Control

INTRODUCTION

- 1) Paul illustrates the Christian Race by comparing it to a physical race.
 - a) Those who want to win have to really be in control in their lives.
 - b) This is true in both races!
- 2) We would thus conclude:
 - a) To live the Christian life successfully.....
 - b) It must be a controlled life!
- 3) It is not a life characterized by:
 - a) Indifference, unconcern, fickleness, uncertainty, indecision.
 - b) Not wishy-washy....carried about by every wind of doctrine that comes along.
 - c) Not one that is on and off depending upon the mood of the person.
- 4) It must be a life characterized by Control, Restraint, Temperance, Resolution, Determination, Backbone, Mastery over self, Self-discipline.

DISCUSSION

I. THE NECESSITY OF SUCH A LIFE SHOULD BE OBVIOUS

A. Common sense shows it.

- 1) All can see the need of such in life's situations.
- 2) We know the successful persons are those whose lives are in control.

B. Scriptures teach it.

- 1) In the physical realm (1 Cor. 9:25).
- 2) In the spiritual realm (1 Cor. 9:26-27).
- 3) 2 Pet. 1:5-6

C. Illustrated:

- 1) If a man rides a wild horse and breaks him, he has only conquered an animal.
- 2) If a man knocks another man out in a boxing match, he has only conquered another man.
- 3) But, when a man has brought his life into conformity to God's will, he has to have conquered himself.
- 4) Prov. 16:32

II. THE DUAL NATURE OF THIS CONTROL

A. It is to be in control of one's self.

- 1) It is to live a self-controlled life.
- 2) It is the conquering of ourselves.
- 3) As Paul stated in 1 Cor. 9:27.
- 4) It is the ruling of one's spirit—control of one's body as well.
- 5) It is control:
 - a) In the midst of dangers;
 - b) In the midst of confusion;
 - c) In the midst of trials;
 - d) In the midst of controversy;

- e) In the midst of temptations.
- f) 1 Pet. 2:11; 1 Thess. 4:3-5; Jas. 1:19, 26
- 6) It is to live a chaste life (1 Tim. 2:9; Tit. 2:5; 1 Pet. 3:1-2).
- 7) Illustration:
 - a) Little boy of 14 was forced to go to work in factory of older men.
 - b) They cursed, drank, quarreled.
 - c) One day they teased the boy telling him he wasn't good for anything.
 - d) "I may be small, but I can do things which you cannot."
 - e) "And what is that?" they sneeringly asked.
 - f) "I can control myself and keep from swearing, drinking, and fighting."
- 8) But proper control is not without guidance from God (Prov. 3:5; Jer. 10:23).

B. It is a life controlled by God.

- 1) Paul expressed this in Gal. 2:20.
- 2) The Bible emphasizes that we are controlled by one of two masters (Matt. 6:24; Rom. 6:16).
- 3) Illustrate:
 - a) A dove can light on a high-powered electric wire and not be hurt.
 - b) Reason—He gives himself fully to that one wire.
----He does not touch something else about him.
 - c) But, if man touches it while touching the ground, electrocuted.
- 4) It is when we reach one hand to God....and another to Mammon, that we are in trouble.
- 5) This is the reason for Jesus' strong statements in:
 - a) 1 John 2:15-17
 - b) 2 Cor. 6:17-18
 - c) Luke 14:26
- 6) It is a matter of who is the Master!

III. THE DESIRABILITY OF A CONTROLLED LIFE.

A. It is the kind of life that pleases God. (Luke 6:46)

B. It is the kind of life that is fruitful unto God. (2 Pet. 1:5-6, 8)

C. It is the kind of life that helps others. (Rom. 12:18-21)

D. It is the kind of life that is successful before God.

- 1) 2 Pet. 1:8-11
- 2) Illustration:
 - a) A minister and a barber were walking through the city slums.
 - b) Barber said to the preacher: "This is why I cannot believe in a God of love. If God was as kind as you say, He would not permit all this poverty, disease and squalor. He would not allow these poor bums to be addicted to dope and other character-destroying habits. No, I cannot believe in a God who permits these things."
 - c) The minister waited until they came to a man who was unkept, filthy, hair hanging down to his shoulders, and a half-inch beard.
 - d) "You can't be a very good barber or you wouldn't permit a man like that to continue living in this neighborhood without a haircut or shave."

- e) Indignantly the barber answered: *“Why blame me for the man’s condition? I can’t help it that he is like that. He has never given me a chance to help him. If he would only come to my shop, I could fix him up and make him look like a gentleman.”*
- f) Giving the barber a penetrating look, the minister said: *“Then, don’t blame God for allowing these people to continue in their evil ways, when He is constantly inviting them to come and be saved. The reason these people are slaves to sin and evil habits is that they refused the One who died to save and deliver them.”*

3) A successful life is one submitted to God! Under His control!

CONCLUSION

1) Illustrate :

- a) A man once said: *“If I had some extra money, I’d give it to God, but I have just enough to support myself and family.”*
- b) The same man also said: *“If I had some extra time, I’d give it to God, but every minute is taken up with my job, my family, my clubs, and what have you...every single minute.”*
- c) He also said: *“If I had a talent, I’d give it to God, but I have no lovely voice; I have no special skill; I’ve never been able to lead a group; I can’t think cleverly or quickly, the way I would like to.”*
- d) And....God was touched....and....although it was a risk:
 - God gave that man money, time, and a glorious talent.
 - And then he waited, and waited, and waited.
 - Then, after a while, he shrugged his shoulders, and He took all those things right back from the man---the money, the time, and the glorious talent.
- e) After a while the man sighed and said: *“If I only had some of that money back, I’d give it to God. If I only had some of that time, I’d give it to God, If I could only rediscover that glorious talent, I’d give it to God.”*
- f) And God said..... *“Oh, shut up!”*
- g) And the man told some of his friends.... *“You know, I’m not so sure that I believe in God anymore.”*

2) Who is in control of your life?

Lesson Ten

A Life of Change

INTRODUCTION

- 1) Successful Christian Living is a life of change!
- 2) In fact, it is impossible to become a Christian without change.
 - a) God calls upon all men everywhere to change (repent)! (Acts 17:30)
 - b) Repentance is a change of mind towards God and away from sin (Rom. 6:1-2).
- 3) As well, living the Christian life requires continual change for the better.
 - a) God warns His people to change (Rev. 2:16; 3:19; Heb. 6:4-6)
 - b) This change is always for the better.
 - c) It is a proper change, a desirable change.
 - d) It is God-glorifying change in one's life.
- 4) When one changes as a Christian:
 - a) It indicates something good and desirable.
 - b) In this lesson we want to look at four things that change means!

DISCUSSION

I. CHANGE SHOWS A POSITIVE OUTLOOK

A. Phil. 4:13

- 1) It is saying there is hope for me.
- 2) That things can be done better.
- 3) That I can be a better person....I can change for the better.
- 4) I can be a more effective Christian.
- 5) **"I can do"**.....very positive outlook!
- 6) But it is talking about change!

B. For changes to take place in the church reflects a positive outlook.

- 1) It is saying....we can grow as a congregation of people.
- 2) We can combine our resources, our thinking, our talents, and see results.
- 3) We can make the changes necessary to be a vibrant, zealous, working church.
- 4) Our greatest obstacle to growth is an unwillingness to change.
- 5) Unwillingness to change when needed shows a very negative outlook.

II. CHANGE SAYS "I AM NOT SATISFIED WITH WHERE I AM"

A. Luke 18:9-14

- 1) They trusted in themselves...not God's grace.
- 2) They saw no need of change in their lives when Jesus came to show them.
- 3) Their attitude was:
 - a) See what a good person I am in comparison to this sinner.
 - b) See how many good things I am doing.
- 4) A self-satisfied, self-righteous attitude will condemn us.
 - a) Luke 18:14—**"I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other."**
 - b) The Publican humbled himself, and knew he needed to make changes in his life.

c) The Pharisee needed to make changes, but would not admit such.

B. The forgiveness of God is our motivation for change.

- 1) If I could not be forgiven—no need for trying to make changes.
- 2) But with forgiveness—I can keep on trying to make changes for the better.
- 3) Rev. 2:5—“*Repent, and do the first works....*”

III. CHANGE RECOGNIZES THAT THERE IS ROOM FOR GROWTH

A. 2 Pet. 3:18

- 1) The Christian recognizes that he hasn't arrived yet!
- 2) He also recognizes that he has unlimited potential for growth with God's help.
- 3) He is always striving to make changes for the better.

B. The reason why is that his goal is perfection!

- 1) Matt. 5:48; Eph. 4:13
- 2) My goal is to be like Christ in every aspect of my life!
- 3) There will always be room for growth or change for the better.

C. Lack of growth or change for the better is condemned (Heb. 5:12)!

IV. CHANGE COMES BECAUSE I HAVE LEARNED TO TURN MY TRIALS & TRIBULATIONS INTO STEPPING STONES TO HIGHER GROUND.

A. Jas. 1:2-4

- 1) We can let trials defeat us, turn us sour, or turn us away from God.
- 2) Or, they can become ways of growing/changing our lives for the better.
- 3) Rev. 12:10-11

B. There is no greater message for the Christian than the assurance of triumph over Satan!

- 1) We can be overcomers!
- 2) Even if it means giving up our lives for Christ—we can triumph!
- 3) The great value of trials & tribulations is—they help me make needed changes for the better in my life.
- 4) They become stepping stones to successful Christian living!

CONCLUSION

- 1) Negative attitudes are our hindrances to successful Christian living!
 - a) “*I don't need to change.*”
 - b) “*I don't want to change.*”
 - c) “*I can't change.*”
- 2) We don't need a bunch of “yes” people about us that invalidates needed change!
 - a) “*I don't need change.*” Yes, Yes!
 - b) “*I am good enough just like I am to be acceptable to God.*” Yes, Yes!
 - c) “Yes” people only make me feel comfortable like I am.
 - d) We need to be confronted/challenged to make needed changes.
- 3) It is only in a life of change that we will be successful as Christians!

Lesson Eleven

A Captivating Life

INTRODUCTION

- 1) A successful Christian life is a Captivating Life!
 - a) Captivating...a compelling life...being compelled by someone or something!
 - b) A life that is impelled or almost coerced by someone or something!
 - c) To be captured by the excellence of someone or something!
 - d) It is like a captive audience...having no choice but to hear!
 - e) We have no choice in living the Christian life...we are captivated by Jesus!
- 2) Intelligent people carefully select the motives upon which they act.
 - a) They evaluate, weigh in the balances, and then decide on the way they are to act.
 - b) The unwise person will be blindly led into acting:
 - By whatever happens at the moment;
 - Or, by whatever bodily passions may be excited;
 - Or, their actions are not well thought out.
- 3) Motives for man's actions range from the animal desires to the divine motives.
- 4) And since man is moved by motivations:
 - a) The entire aspect and character of a man's life may be changed by merely changing his motivation.
 - b) A new & nobler motive can make a better & nobler person.
 - c) Noble living comes from noble motives.
- 5) Paul says that man can have the highest of motivations to serve God! (2 Cor. 5:9-15)
- 6) In this lesson:
 - a) We want to see what this motivation is;
 - b) And, see the results of such motivation!

DISCUSSION

I. 2 COR. 5:14

A. It is like the difference between duty & desire!

- 1) We do our duty because we feel obligated to do so.
- 2) We have a sense of ought—we ought to serve God
- 3) We ought to be grateful to God.
- 4) We ought to give our bodies as a living sacrifice to God (Rom. 12:1-2).
- 5) 1 Cor. 9:16
- 6) There is nothing wrong with a sense of ought or duty!

B. But Paul had something greater compelling him to serve God!

- 1) It was a sense of the love of God—***“The love of Christ constrains me.”***
- 2) Paul not only felt obligated to preach the gospel (1 Cor. 9:16);
- 3) But, he had a great desire to preach it—he was compelled to do so.

C. Paul's life was a captivated life—a highly motivated life.

- 1) He was so enthralled with the love & mercy of God that he had to tell it (Rom. 1:16).
- 2) He was very impressed with Jesus' willingness to die for him (1 Tim. 1:12-17).

- 3) He was so ensnared by the love of God through Jesus that he was willing to suffer and even die in the service of God (2 Cor. 6:3-10).

C. Man's highest inducement to serve God is love.

- 1) God's love is a moral & spiritual force of vast power.
- 2) It awakens gratitude, love, devotion, and obedience!
- 3) Jesus said: "***And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.***" (John 12:32).
- 4) God's love is a powerful inducement for man to love Him in return (1 Jn. 4:10)
- 5) No wonder Jesus said that love for God & our fellowman summed up all the Law and Prophets (Matt. 22:40).

II. WHAT IS THE EFFECT OF THIS CAPTIVATION?

A. 2 Cor. 5:14-15

- 1) It causes us not to live just for self.
- 2) It keeps us from self-indulgence, worldliness, and other sins (Gal. 2:20).
- 3) It encourages us to imitate the selfless life of Jesus.

B. The effect it had on Paul's life:

- 1) Before his conversion:
 - a) He feared God and revered His Law.
 - b) He walked in all good conscience.
- 2) But when He saw the great love of God through Christ:
 - a) He looked upon himself as the chief of sinners (1 Tim. 1:15).
 - b) One that was undeserving of forgiveness—yet, received it.
 - c) His life was forever changed—captivated!
 - d) He braved the greatest perils—faced & opposed the greatest powers.
 - e) He made the greatest sacrifices—even death itself.
 - f) Why? The love of Christ constrained him, possessed him, carried him on life a resistless torrent!
- 3) The love of Christ, when fully understood, will act like a great spiritual force.

C. The effect upon others:

- 1) 2 Cor. 8:1-5; Acts 2:44-47; 7:54-60; 1 John 3:16, etc.
- 2) And so also with us:
 - a) We are so captivated by the love of Christ.....
 - b) That it causes us to be willing to give up ourselves to serve others.
- 6) And on and on the story goes.....Noble & beneficent people who have been captivated by the selfless love of Christ!

CONCLUSION

- 1) What about your life & mine?
 - a) Have we been captivated by the love of Christ?
 - b) Are we constrained to serve Him because of His love for us?
 - c) Are we becoming selfless people like Christ?
- 2) Do we truly have the spirit of Christ within our lives?

Lesson Twelve

A Life With A Crown

INTRODUCTION

- 1) God has placed before man Life or Death!
 - a) He encourages man to choose life!
 - b) But man must make the choice for himself! (Deut. 30:19)
- 2) Our problem is the same as Adam's:
 - a) We choose death, instead of life!
 - b) Adam disobeyed God, transgressed, and suffered separation from God—gave up life.
 - c) We do the same (Rom. 6:23).
 - d) The curse of disobedience is upon mankind and will pay the ultimate penalty (eternal death) in judgment (Heb. 9:27).
- 3) But our lessons have been dealing with successfully living the Christian life.
 - a) And...in this lesson, we are saying that such a life ends in a **“crown of righteousness”**
 - b) Which is obviously saying that man does not have to live under the curse of death and without hope (Eph. 2:12).
 - c) Man can find this hope in the sacrificial death of Christ and a life dedicated to serving Christ (Eph. 2:13; 2 Tim. 4:6-8)
 - d) And, it is this hope that motivates us to live the Christian life successfully!

DISCUSSION

I. MAN MUST HAVE HOPE TO LIVE RIGHTEOUSLY

A. Man needs hope just to exist in this world.

- 1) When people lose hope—they have no purpose for living.
- 2) They give up and/or end their life.

B. And, man needs hope for his soul, as well!

- 1) Hope is a great motivator for man (Rom. 8:24).
- 2) Ps. 42:11 gives a message of hope to the:
 - a) Cast down, disquieted, those ready to give up.
 - b) This hope is found in God.
 - c) There is reason to keep trying.

C. Hope is a magic ingredient in motivation.

- 1) 1 Cor. 9:24-25
 - a) Why do men run in a race?
 - b) Why do they strive for the mastery?
 - c) Why do they exercise such self-control in their lives?
 - d) Answer—to win a “corruptible” crown!
- 2) Why do Christians run the race of life with great self-control?
 - a) Answer—to win an “incorruptible” crown!
 - b) There is a reward awaiting those who run the race correctly (2 Tim. 2:5)
- 3) Illustration:
 - a) A former Governor of New Jersey (Harry Moore) was telling about his early boyhood.
 - b) His father died—Mother & children had barely enough to survive.

- c) Harry came home one evening very discouraged.
- d) *“Mother, I am very discouraged. There’s no hope for me in this world. I’d like to be somebody and do something, but I can’t do it because we haven’t got any money, we have no friends, nor influence, and everything is against us. There is no future for me.”*
- e) His mother, with stern eye and voice replied: *“Listen to me, son, if you continue to talk that way, you never will amount to anything; because that which you constantly affirm is that which you will ultimately become. What you need is God and gumption.”*
- f) The boy needed hope!

II. MAN MUST DEAL WITH FAILURE TO LIVE THE CHRISTIAN LIFE SUCCESSFULLY

A. The history books are filled with people who failed, but made good.

- 1) Just because one failed at some things does not mean that he or she is a failure.
- 2) We may lose a battle today, but win the war tomorrow—if we get up and keep trying.
- 3) Failure is fatal only when it is final!
 - a) It is not final when we get up and keep trying.
 - b) The Devil wants us to stay down.
 - c) God wants us to get up and keep trying.

B. Perhaps there is a correlation between the number of times we are willing to fail and The greatness of the success we ultimately achieve.

- 1) Look at Mr. Edison:
 - a) He failed far more than he succeeded.
 - b) Yet, his successes were great.
- 2) Look at Mr. Lincoln:
 - a) He failed far more than he succeeded.
 - b) Yet, look at his ultimate success.
- 3) They failed more because they kept trying more.
- 4) But, they also succeeded more!

C. Is it a sin to fail at something?

- 1) Yes and no.
- 2) Yes it is a sin when failure is due to moral or spiritual laxness or laziness (Jas. 4:17)
- 3) That is the reason why we will be lost...if we stay down!
- 4) When we do wrong (fail to be what we ought to be)...what do we do?
 - a) Repent and pray and get up and keep on trying.
 - b) Or, be stubborn, unrepentant, and remain a failure!
- 5) Our measure of success as a Christian:
 - a) Is not determined by a lack of failure.....
 - b) But by our faithfulness to God (1 Cor. 4:2)

III. SUCCESSFUL CHRISTIAN LIVING IS A LIFE WITH A CROWN

A. 2 Tim. 4:6-8

- 1) Paul had lived the Christian Life successfully.
- 2) His motivation was ***“A crown of righteousness.”***
- 3) The reason for his assurance:
 - a) He had fought a good fight. (He had not won every battle)
 - b) He had finished his course. (He did not give up in the race)
 - c) He had kept the faith. (He did not allow his faith to be overthrown)

B. James 1:12

- 1) Who shall receive a crown of life?
- 2) Answer:
 - a) The one that endures temptation.
 - b) The one who is tried and put to the test.
 - c) The one who loves the Lord.

C. 1 Cor. 9:25-27

- 1) Who shall receive an incorruptible crown?
- 2) Answer:
 - a) The one who runs the race correctly.
 - b) The one who fights the good fight.
 - c) The one who keeps his body in subjection to God's will.

D. Rev. 2:10

- 1) Who shall receive a crown of life?
- 2) The one who is faithful in the midst of trials.

E. What is a crown of life?

- 1) It is victory in life over Satan.
- 2) It is victory over death, and receiving eternal life.

CONCLUSION

- 1) It is important that we do not lose our crown at the last.
 - a) It is very important that we get started in the race.
 - b) Also, that we run the race lawfully.
 - c) But, it is just as important that we finish the race successfully!
- 2) Illustration:
 - a) A tired & weary traveler sought food & rest at a missionary's home in Africa.
 - b) Next morning—he was still tired and sore from walking.
 - c) He had a great distance still to go, however.
 - d) He asked if they had a horse to loan him to finish his journey.
 - e) The reply, *“Yes, but he is a religiously trained horse.”*
 - f) *“How is that?”* the traveler asked.
 - g) *“Well, to get him to do, don't say ‘get up,’ but ‘Thank the Lord.’”*
 - h) *“If you want him to go faster, say it twice.”*
 - i) *“If you want him to run, say it three times.”*
 - j) *“If you want him to stop, don't say ‘whoa,’ but ‘Amen.’”*
 - k) The traveler got started slow.
 - l) As he got more confidence, he said *“Thank the Lord”* twice—it worked!
 - m) Then, he said it 3 times...the horse started running faster.

- n) However, up in front of him he saw what looked like a jumping off place.
 - o) He started hollering to the horse to “*whoa,*” but there was no response.
 - p) He remembered then to say “*Amen,*” and the horse slide to a stop at the edge.
 - q) When he looked over the edge, he saw what a close call he had experienced.
 - r) With a sigh of relief the man said, “*Thank the Lord.*”
- 3) Paul said he had a crown of reward because:
- a) He had finished his course.
 - b) He had kept the faith---faithful to the end!
- 4) Let's not lose our crown by becoming unfaithful in our later years.
- 5) Remember failure is only fatal when it is final.
- 6) Successful Christian living is not without some failures—but it is characterized by a faithfulness unto death!
- 7) And, it is a life with a crown!

Lesson Thirteen

A Life of Challenge to Believe

INTRODUCTION

1. True, sincere belief **must** be a challenged because so much emphasis has been placed in the Scriptures on believing!
2. This is seen in both Old and New Testament Scriptures.
 - a) It is easily illustrated by the Apostles of Jesus.
 - b) They were chosen by Jesus;
 - c) They saw Him perform miracles;
 - d) They heard the voice of God from Heaven giving recognition to Jesus as the Son of God;
 - e) etc.
3. And yet, they still had trouble with belief!
 - a) Jesus even rebuked them for their faith being so weak—*"O you of little faith!"*
 - b) Judas, after being with Jesus for over three years, betrayed Him.
 - c) Peter denied Him three times with an oath.
 - d) All the disciples forsook Him when He was taken in the Garden.
4. So, why is it such a challenge to believe—even when you are there on the spot and witness such things?

DISCUSSION

I. THE CHRISTIAN WALK IS ONE OF FAITH AND NOT SIGHT! (2 Cor. 5:7)

A. What is meant by this expression?

- 1) Does this mean that one's faith is merely a "leap in the dark" or "a blind faith."
- 2) Why do we constantly hear the expression: **"Seeing is Believing?"**
- 3) Does a person have to see something in order to believe it?
- 4) How was the Apostle using this expression in 2 Cor. 5:7?

B. Need to go to context of 2 Cor. 5:7.

- 1) He is talking about the hope of a Christian (5:1).
- 2) He infers that there is going to be a resurrection of the body.
- 3) Our spirit was "housed" in that body while living on earth.
- 4) At death, the spirit will leave the body (Jas. 2:26).
- 5) In the resurrection, the spirit & body will be re-united.
- 6) But the old body will be changed into a new "spiritual" body (1 Cor. 15:44).
- 7) This new body is no longer "mortal" but "immortal." (1 Cor. 15:54).

C. How did the Apostle know these things?

- 1) He could not have known such by "sight" for he had not seen such!
- 2) But he could know it by "faith" because God said so!
- 3) He was fully assured or certain of this great "fact!"
- 4) Faith has the ability to make the unseen, real!
- 5) ***"Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen."***
- 6) Heb. 11:1

II. WHAT IS MEANT BY EXPRESSION—"Seeing is Believing?"

A. Is there a value to seeing things in respect to faith?

- 1) Look at Jesus' conversation with Thomas.
- 2) John 20:24-31
 - a) After Jesus' resurrection He appeared to the Apostles (with the exception of Thomas).
 - b) When the Apostles told Thomas that Jesus was resurrected and that they had seen Him—Thomas doubted.
 - c) He told them—he would only believe if he could see Him.
 - d) For some reason, he did not believe the other Apostles' word.
 - e) About a week later, Jesus appeared to all of the Apostles.
 - f) He confronted Thomas about his lack of faith.
 - g) He told him to see his nailed-scared hands and to put his hand into his side.
 - h) ***"Do not be unbelieving, but believing!"***
 - i) Thomas, then openly stated his faith: ***"My Lord and my God!"***
 - j) Seeing helped Thomas to believe.
 - k) But then, Jesus added this statement: ***Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."***
- 3) We don't believe Jesus was advocating "blind faith.".....but faith based on evidence.
 - a) The last two verses show this clearly.
 - b) The miracles Jesus performed were evidences sufficient to help people believe in Him as the Christ, the Son of God.
 - c) There is a value in "seeing" but such does not automatically bring faith.
 - d) Many of the Jewish people saw these miracles but did not believe!

III. "SIGHT" versus "FAITH"

A. When sight is contrasted to faith...it is different from the idea of "Seeing is believing."

- 1) It is like comparing:
 - a) Light to darkness
 - b) Enlightenment to unenlightened (Jn. 3:19-21).
- 2) It is walking after the "wisdom of men" rather than the "wisdom of God." (1 Cor. 1:19-21; 2:4-8).
- 3) It is to walk after the "philosophy, empty deceit, the tradition of men, and the basic principles of the world" (Col. 2:8) rather than after Christ who is ***"the way, the truth, and the life."*** (Jn. 14:6).

B. To walk by "Sight"

- 1) Is to walk by what the world advocates;
- 2) To walk by the approval or esteem of men;
- 3) Or, to walk under the influence and persuasion of things seen and temporal only;

- 4) To make our judgments, decisions, and to determine our actions on the basis of what the world says or offers.

C. To walk by "Faith"

- 1) Is to walk as God directs us in His Word (2 Jn. 9).
- 2) To walk by the "wisdom" of God (1 Cor. 2:5).
- 3) To "see" and to "know" the "unseen" as though they were actually seen with our physical eye.
- 4) We are just that sure of their existence!

IV. WHY DOES "SIGHT" CHALLENGE OUR "FAITH?"

A. The Majority verses the Minority!

- 1) Matt. 7:13-14
 - a) The majority is going the broad way, but the minority is traveling the narrow or difficult way.
 - b) Numbers play a big role in why people follow or walk a certain way. (Jn. 5:44).
 - c) But Jesus pointed out that those who follow the majority go the way of destruction.
 - d) But those who follow the few leads to everlasting life.
- 2) We need to follow the way of "faith!"

B. The Pride and egotism of men!

- 1) 1 Jn. 2:16
 - a) Pride has been a problem for man ever since the beginning.
 - b) Eve gave in to the temptation of pride.
 - c) Gen. 3:5-6
 - d) Satan fell because of pride (1 Tim. 3:6).
 - e) James and Peter both warn of the dangers of pride (Jas. 4:6; 1 Pet. 5:5).
- 2) If a man really believed in God:
 - a) He would not "pit" his "wisdom" against the "wisdom of God!"
 - b) Such would be very foolish! (Prov. 3:5).
 - c) And yet, it is done all the time!
 - d) The wise man warned: ***"Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil."*** (Prov. 3:7).

- 3) We need to walk the way of "faith" not the way of pride and arrogance!

C. Deception!

- 1) Heb. 3:12-13
 - a) Eve was deceived by Satan's lies (1 Tim. 2:14; 2 Cor. 11:3).
 - b) Satan works through his "ministers" that pose as "ministers of righteousness!"
 - c) 2 Cor. 11:14-15.
 - d) Their purpose is to deceive!
- 2) We are warned about the deceitfulness of riches (Matt. 13:22).
- 3) We are warned not to let others deceive us with empty words (Eph. 5:6).
- 4) We are also warned of the danger of "self-deception" (1 Cor. 3:18).
- 5) Any of us can be deceived if we are not very careful.

- 6) We need to be concerned about walking the way of "faith" rather than "sight."

CONCLUSION

1. The first and greatest command: "***Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.***" (Matt. 22:37).
2. It would seem most appropriate to me to suggest that we need to **believe** in God with our whole being also!
3. The evidences are there to help us to believe in God.
4. If God is God, then we certainly ought to believe in what He says!
5. Our walk is a walk of faith—not according to the course or principles of this world.
6. May we allow God to increase our faith by dwelling on His Word.
 - a) That gives us hope and strengthens our faith.
 - b) Rom. 10:17; Acts 20:32

