

Challenges
For The
Christian

13 Lessons

Prepared by:

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2004

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Lesson One

"THE GOSPEL OF CHALLENGE"**INTRODUCTION**

1. Israel was in deep trouble, spiritually. (**1 Kings 18:17-24**)
 - a) They had turn to idolatry
 - b) They had forsaken God's commands and followed Baalim (v. 18)
2. Elijah requested for all the people to come together at Mt. Carmel, with the prophets of Baal.
3. Elijah faced the people with a great challenge:
 - a) V. 21—***"How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him, but if Baal, then follow him.***
 - b) The people answered nothing!
4. Elijah called for a contest to determine who the true God was!
5. You remember the outcome:
 - a) The prophets of Baal cried all day for their god to consume the sacrifice...to no avail.
 - b) Then, Elijah called upon the true & living God....and the sacrifice, the altar, and the water around the altar were all consumed.
 - c) The prophets of Baal were all slain.
6. The same challenge is with us today:
 - a) Men turn to their "idols," rather than to the true & living God.
 - b) Men & women of courage are needed:
 - 1) To respond to the call of God;
 - 2) To answer the challenge of living for Christ;
 - 3) Who will both do right & stand for the right!
 - 4) Who will do the will of God, keep His commandments!
7. The question for us is:
 - a) Do we want to hear a Gospel of comfort;
 - b) Or, a gospel of challenge?

DISCUSSION**I. UNFORTUNATELY, MOST PEOPLE WANT TO HEAR A GOSPEL OF COMFORT!**

- A. They prefer to hear a watered-down Christianity.**
 - 1) That takes all the pain, sacrifice, and guilt out of it.
 - 2) That makes them feel comfortable.
 - 3) One that deceives me into believing that sin is not all that bad.
- B. One that sees no need to speak out against sin & religious error.**
 - 1) See no need to hear lessons against Liberalism, Modernism, Sectarianism, or Cultism.
 - 2) One that lets them continue in their ungodly acts without rebuke.
 - 3) One that justifies SOCIAL SINS IN THE NAME OF *"Everybody is doing it."*
- C. A gospel that doesn't require heart conversion!**
 - 1) One that allows my heart to stay on worldly things.
 - 2) One that allows me to be Unconcerned & Cold towards reaching the lost.

- 3) One that doesn't require ENTHUSIAM, ZEAL, & HARD WORK.
- 4) One that encourages me to:
 - a) Want something for nothing;
 - b) Want the easy way of life;
 - c) To become too soft.

II. WE SHOULD WANT TO HEAR & RESPOND TO A GOSPEL OF CHALLENGE.

A. The true gospel that says:

- 1) 2 Pet. 3:9—"***God is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.***"
- 2) Mark 16:16—"***He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be condemned.***"
- 3) 2 Thess. 1:7-9—"***...when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power....***"
- 4) One that urges men & women to turn to God while there is opportunity:
"Today, if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts..." (Heb. 3:7-8)

B. We need to hear the Gospel that will challenge men to live like those portrayed in the Bible:

- 1) Like Ezekiel:
 - a) Who stood faithfully & courageously before a sinful & rebellious people.
 - b) Denouncing their sins of: Injustice, Adultery, Idolatry, untruthfulness, Perverseness among leaders & people, etc.
 - c) Ezek. 22:26-31
- 2) Like Joseph:
 - a) Who was strong and obedient to God even in sorrows.
 - b) Who could turn his back on dishonesty, lust, and temptation;
 - c) And remain true to God.
 - d) When tempted by the wife of his master, He said:
 - e) Gen. 39:9—"***There is none greater in this house than I; neither hath he kept back any thing from me but thee, because thou art his wife: how then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?"***"
- 3) Like Moses:
 - a) Who could turn his back upon Position, Power, Wealth, and Pleasures.
 - b) To do something far greater....To Work With God to Free His People.
 - c) And be willing to suffer in the process.
 - d) Heb. 11:24-27
- 4) Like Paul:
 - a) Who traveled the FAR & Wide to carry the gospel to the lost.
 - b) Who suffered shipwrecks, imprisonments, stonings, beatings, cold, hunger, torture, etc.
 - c) And he did it gladly....in service to Christ.

- d) He realized that the Gospel of Comfort wasn't for him. (Phil. 4:13)
- 5) Like David, Joshua, Isaiah, Peter, Hannah, Sarah, Mary, etc.
 - a) Men & women who showed great courage in life;
 - b) Who faced....the giants of life;
 - The temptations of sin;
 - The waves of unbelief;
 - The waters of doubt;
 - c) And remained faithful to God.
- C. We need to hear and respond to the gospel that challenges us to:**
 - 1) Use our knowledge, energies, talents, possessions in His cause.
 - 2) Speak to the lost out of a sense of urgency to obey God's will.
 - 3) Stand with strong convictions....even if it means standing alone.
 - 4) Refuse to use the escape phrase: "Everybody is doing it!"
 - a) What was "Everybody doing":
 - 1—When Noah was building the Ark?
 - 2—When God destroyed Sodom & Gomorrha?
 - 3—When Elijah faced the people with a choice of which they should serve?
 - b) What was the popular thing to do in the MOB that was calling for Jesus' crucifixion?
 - c) Isn't it remarkable how people will:
 - 1—Renounce all conviction & good judgment;
 - 2—To follow some evil way.....
 - 3—Just because "Everybody is doing it."
 - d) Exo. 23:2—"*Thou shalt not follow a multitude to do evil.*"
- D. We don't need to hear the Gospel that allows us to:**
 - 1) Be a comfortable Pew Warmer only!
 - 2) Or, to be a Spectator in the great battle of life & death.
- E. Rather, We need to hear a gospel that challenges us:**
 - 1) To get into the fight against sin, wickedness, & the powers of darkness. (Eph. 6:13)
 - 2) To come out of the world, not to love it. (1 Jn. 2:15)
 - 3) To place our emphasis upon things above. (Col. 3:1)
 - 4) To let God have His way in our lives. (Rom. 12:1)
 - 5) To let God show us our besetting sins....so we can put them away. (Eph. 4:22)
 - 6) To die to self, the world, greed, temptations of this world. (Gal. 2:20)

III. WE HAVE A GREAT TASK AHEAD OF US:

A. The world is being filled with the gospel of:

- 1) Comfort, Modernism, Non-conviction, Compromise, and Greed.
- 2) Even rebellion against God.

B. God is calling upon you & I to stand in the gap & speak out.

- 1) Speak out with a Godly life;
- 2) Speak out with a Kind, Compassionate, Loving attitude.

- 3) But speak out in words of:
 - a) Salvation or Damnation;
 - b) Life or Death
 - c) Light or Darkness;
 - d) Justification or condemnation.
- 4) To do so, we will need to be men & women of:
 - a) Faith
 - b) Character
 - c) Conviction
 - d) Courage.

C. So, the real question is not....Where is the God of Elijah?

- 1) He is where He has always been....greatly concerned for mankind.
- 2) The question is....Where are the Elijahs?
 - a) Where are the 7,000 who have not bowed the knee to the god of this world?
 - b) Where are the Moses, Joshuas, Davids, Peters, Pauls, Marys, Deborahs?
 - c) Where are those who are willing to answer the gospel of challenge.
- 3) The need for their kind never ceases.

CONCLUSION

1. To answer the gospel of challenge:
 - a) Will be costly to us;
 - b) Will require that we give up our wills to the Will of God;
 - c) Will be a thankless task at times;
 - d) Will receive no great fanfare;
 - e) Will receive no applause from the world;
2. But God will reward the faithful someday with Eternal Life.
3. Have you answer the gospel of challenge yet?

Lesson Two

"THE CHALLENGE TO LIFT UP YOUR EYES"

INTRODUCTION

1. The Writer of the Psalm is calling upon God's people to look up! (Psalm 121:1-8)
 - a) Lift up your eyes to God.
 - b) Look to Him for help.
 - c) He is always aware of the condition & needs of His people.
 - d) He can give them the vision they need to survive the ordeals of life.
2. Today, we need that same admonition!
 - a) We, too, need to lift up our eyes to see God in all of His greatness, goodness, grace, love, and mercy for His people.
 - b) We need to see the great work that he expects of His people.
 - c) And to realize that He is here to help us do this great work.
 - d) We are not alone, He is with us, by our side, pulling with us.
3. The challenge to lift up our eyes:
 - a) Is not only that we might see the True & Living God in all His glory.
 - b) But that we might lift our sights higher....to have a **greater vision** of what needs to & can be done!
 - c) God has constantly challenged His people with Great Visions & Goals.

DISCUSSION

I. GREAT VISIONS GOD HAS PLACED BEFORE MEN:

A. Before Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3)

- 1) You will become a great nation.
- 2) You will have your own land or country.
- 3) Through one of your seed I will bless all nations.
- 4) What a vision!
- 5) What a challenge to Abraham & his descendants!

B. Before Israel through Moses (Exo. 3:16-22)

- 1) I know your condition in Egypt.
- 2) I will visit you.
- 3) I will bring you up out of bondage.
- 4) I will smite Egypt with all my wonders.
- 5) I will bring you into the land that I promised.
- 6) What a vision!
- 7) What a vision of hope for an enslaved people for centuries!

C. The greatest vision God has placed before men...the Hope of Heaven! (1 Cor. 2:9-10)

- 1) It gives us desire & enlarges our hope
- 2) It gives us motivation.
- 3) It gives us purpose for living & serving faithfully here.

D. If God places VISIONS & POSSIBILITIES before mankind:

- 1) Then, why can't we see the value of such for us today?
- 2) Not only those that God has given to us, but visions & possibilities of how to get the job done He wants done.
- 3) The purpose of this lesson is to try to do this.

II. LET US LIFT UP OUR EYES AND SEE:**A. Where can this congregation be in 5 years?**

- 1) What is a minimum and maximum of growth that is possible for us.
- 2) What could our giving be in five years?
- 3) How many new families would we need to reach each year to reach the goal?

B. What will it take to make this growth possible?

- 1) For each of us to grow some spiritually each year.
- 2) All working towards this end!
- 3) More able teachers of God's Word out there teaching the lost.
- 4) More people working to reach the lost.
- 5) "Each One Win One".....concept.
 - a) Every member try hard to influence & teach a friend or family member.
 - b) Or, to open the door for someone else to teach them.
- 6) To think and envision big! (John 14:12-14)
- 7) To pray fervently.
- 8) To put our hands to the plow & work!

C. If a great vision was put before us, how would we deal with it?

- 1) Like the Israelites..... *"We are as grasshoppers in their sight?"* (Num. 13:33)
- 2) Or, *"If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Rom. 8:31)
- 3) It is God's Will that all be saved....so He is ready to help us, when we make up our minds to do what we should!

III. WE NEED A UNIFIED VISION FOR THE FUTURE.**A. Illustrated by Nehemiah & Israel.**

- 1) Nehemiah was concerned about His people, the city of Jerusalem, etc.
- 2) He requested a leave of absence from his job with the King of Persia to go back to Jerusalem to help them.
- 3) When he arrived:
 - a) He started gathering up all the factual information needed.
 - b) He saw what the needs were.
 - c) He envisioned what could be done if the people would work together.
 - d) He presented the vision to the people.
- 4) The response of the people:
 - a) Neh. 2:18—*"Then I told them of the hand of my God which was good upon me; as also the king's words that he had spoken unto me. And they said, Let us rise up and build. So they strengthened their hands for this good work."*
 - b) The job was completed in 52 days.
 - c) And it was done in the midst of outside opposition.

B. A unified direction & goal for the people was needed.

- 1) They did not need to be pulled in several different directions.
- 2) They would have been defeated before they started.
- 3) Unity gave them strength & greater possibilities for good.
- 4) And so it will for us as well!

CONCLUSION

1. Let's be encouraged to:
 - a) Continue to think positive about the Lord's Work here.
 - b) Continue planning the work in advance...even years in advance.
 - c) Not be weary in well-doing...***"For in due season we shall reap if we faint not."*** (Gal. 6:9)
 - d) 1 Cor. 15:58—***"Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye steadfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labor is not in vain in the Lord."***
 - e) And let's keep asking God's help to accomplish His Will in our lives.
2. Illustration:
 - a) A preacher was up before the church trying to get them to move out:
 - 1) *"This church is going to get up and walk."* (Amen brother, let her walk).
 - 2) *"This church is going to get up and run."* (Amen brother, let her run).
 - 3) *"This church is going to get up and fly"* (Amen brother, let her fly).
 - 4) *"This church needs workers & lots of giving to make it fly."*
 - 5) Let her walk brother, let her walk!
3. I am sure that all of us would like to see the church here FLY!
 - a) But are we willing to put out the work necessary for it to fly?
 - b) And are we willing to do the giving necessary for it to fly?
 - c) I HOPE SO!
 - d) For I, too, would like to see this church fly!

Lesson Three

"CHALLENGE TO RISE ABOVE MEDIOCRITY"**INTRODUCTION**

1. Illustration:
 - a) Daughter of a coal miner...hard life...very little chance in life.
 - b) But she conceived in her mind to go to college.
 - c) No one else in family had done so.
 - d) She studied hard...finished High School with honors.
 - e) Received scholarships and worked....received degree from college.
 - f) Then, took special course in Insurance.
 - g) Asked for a job...refused...she was a woman...no experience.
 - h) Asked again and again....finally in desperation, a man gave her a job.
 - i) 25 years later:
 - 1—After she was begrudgingly hired;
 - 2—She was honored as an outstanding insurance sales producer in the country.
 - j) She had refused to live in the valley of despair & mediocrity.
 - k) She would not take defeat.
2. Questions:
 - a) Why does someone like this succeed well in life?
 - b) Why doesn't everyone do what Mary Crowe did?
3. A large part of the answer is MEDIOCRITY!
 - a) Most people are content to live a mediocre life.
 - b) They go so far...get comfortable....start coasting.... they let habit take over.
 - c) No real INTERNAL CHALLENGE to keep them Growing, Reaching, Dreaming!
4. What about Christians?
 - a) Do we see the need to go beyond Mediocrity in our lives?
 - b) Do we see the need for more & more spiritual growth?
 - c) Do we feel it is too much trouble to keep growing?
 - d) Just how would our lives be characterized...Dead, Mediocre, Zealous?
 - e) Is it a matter of Indifference? Are we concerned?
5. Listen to the Words of Jesus in Rev. 3:15-16, 19:

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spew thee out of my mouth."....."As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent."

 - a) The Lord wants us to be Hot, Zealous, Boiling over for Him.
 - b) Lukewarmness, unconcernedness, lack of zealousness is not what God wants!
 - c) The Lord wants us to:
 - 1) See the great potential in our lives in His service;
 - 2) To see that we are capable of doing far more than we give ourselves credit for;
 - 3) That we need to be challenged to climb to higher ground.

DISCUSSION**I. THE LORD HAS NOT LEFT US WITHOUT ENCOURAGEMENT TO THIS END!****A. Jesus does not call us to do something he gives no help to do.**

- 1) We all need help to live life to the fullest:
 - a) Help from one another;
 - b) From close loved ones;
 - c) Most of all from God.
- 2) Christians are without excuse in having a defeatist attitude.
 - a) We have every reason for success.
 - b) We should make heaven without a question about it.
 - c) We are expected to be faithful & zealous servants of God.
 - d) God has provided the help we need.

B. Scriptures that state this:

- 1) Eph. 3:20—***"Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us..."***
 - a) God has physical power, but also Spiritual Power.
 - b) But God's power is limited by our lack of faith & submission to Him.
 1. Unless we desire knowledge, He cannot enlighten us.
 2. Unless we desire purity, He cannot purify us.
 3. Unless we desire pardon, He cannot pardon us.
 4. Unless we desire spiritual strength, He cannot strengthen us.
 - c) Our unwillingness can limit the power of God in our lives.
 - d) He cannot do many mighty works thru us because of our unbelief!
- 2) Phil. 4:13—***"I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me."***
 - a) God often places great challenges before us.
 - b) And provides the strength to meet those challenges.
 - c) Past limitations have been removed.
 - d) We no longer have to live:
 1. In the valley of mediocrity.
 2. But, rather, we can live in great zealously.
 - e) Christ provides the strength to do all things.
- 3) Phil. 3:13-14—***"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus."***
 - a) We need an ultimate goal to give motivation to our lives.
 - b) God has given it to us.
 - c) We also need goals that challenge us each day of our lives.
 - d) And God has provided such again.
 1. The evangelization of the world.
 2. It is a great goal, a courageous goal for every day.
 3. It calls forth the very best that is within us to reach this goal.
 4. And God provides us with the ability to do the work.

II. JESUS DOES NOT CALL US TO SOMETHING HE DOES NOT PREPARE US FOR.

A. God wants us to live a vibrant, faithful, zealous life for Him.

- 1) He does not expect the impossible, but the possible.
- 2) He has provided sustaining motivation within & without;
- 3) He provides the power within our lives that we need;
- 4) He prepares us for the task ahead.

B. How does he prepare us for our tasks?

- 1) By constantly reminding us of "WHO" we are!
 - a) 1 John 3:1—"**Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God....**"
 - b) 1 Pet. 2:9—"**But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people: that ye should show forth the praises of him who hath calleth you out of darkness into his marvelous light.**"
 - c) Great privilege.....but grave responsibility.
- 2) By constantly reminding us of why he has redeemed us!
 - a) 1 Cor. 6:19-20—"**...ye are not your own...for ye are bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.**"
 - b) We are willing slaves of God...servants of righteousness.
 1. No one forced us, nor coerced us.
 2. It was a choice we freely made...MUST NOT FORGET THIS!
- 3) By reminding us that He does not give us a job beyond what we can do.
 - a) Matt. 25:15—"**And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to every man according to his several (individual) ability...**"
 - b) Rom. 12:6—"**Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us...**"
 - c) There is far more within us than we often realize.
 1. We never know...until we are challenged.
 2. How many really thought we could put a man on the moon?
 3. Could you handle a handicap effectively and thereby glorify God?
 4. Would we handle a divorce of a mate and not lose our zeal to serve God?
 - d) We really don't know the fullness of what we can do until called upon.
 - e) With God's help, we can do all things!
 - f) 2 Tim. 1:6-7—"**Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power (capacity), and of love, and of a sound (clear thinking) mind.**"
 - g) Adversity causes some men to break...others to break records.
 1. J.C. Penny..."I would never have amounted to anything had I not been forced to come up the hard way."

2. Matt. 7:14—"*Because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leads unto life, and few there be that find it.*"
3. God has made the Christian life a Challenge:
 - A—Not to break us!
 - B—But that we might break records!
4. He does not want us to live a mediocre life for Him.

CONCLUSION

1. God calls us to zealous living, not mediocre living.
2. But... "*The fire of enthusiasm won't burn forever, unless you throw some fresh logs upon the fire to feed it.*"
3. We must constantly go to that source of POWER—To God & His Word!
4. God calls us to zealous living for Him.
5. Have we answered that call?

Lesson Four

"CHALLENGE TO UNSELFISH LIVING"**INTRODUCTION**

1. Tertullian—(3rd Century Christian)—*"He who lives only to benefit himself confers on the world a benefit when he dies."*
2. Beecher—(20th Century Orator)—*"Selfishness is that detestable vice which no one will forgive in others, and no one is without in himself."*
3. At the foundation of all sin can be found one word—**SELFISHNESS**
4. If we are ever to be redeemed & useful to God—We must be converted from Selfishness.
5. Christ taught men to be unselfish by command & example.
 - a) Rom. 15:3—***"For even Christ pleased not himself..."***
 - b) He emptied Himself for our welfare.
6. Our challenge... To be unselfish like Christ!
 - a) Rom. 15:2—***"Let every one of us please his neighbor for his good to edification."***
 - b) Phil. 2:4—***"Look not every man on his own things (only), but every man also on the things of others."***
 - c) 1 Cor. 10:24—***"Let no man seek his own (only), but every man another's wealth."***

DISCUSSION**I. 1ST, LOOK AT SELFISHNESS!****A. What is it?**

- 1) *"Undue regard for self, for the interests, desires, wants & affairs of self, for self only."*
- 2) *"To live with self in the center of all things, making all things revolve around self, to seek to satisfy the desires of self always; to disregard others—their interests, rights, welfare & wishes."*

B. What is it's fruits? (Why be concerned about selfishness?)

- 1) It blights & disfigures every relationship of life!
 - a) Brings sorrow into the home;
 - b) Brings havoc into society;
 - c) Brings difficulties into the church.
- 2) Selfishness will:
 - a) Blind our eyes to truth & justice;
 - b) Close our ears to love & mercy;
 - c) Harden our hearts to love of others & God;
 - d) Destroy peace, harmony, unity in the church!
- 3) *"Selfishness is the prolific mother of a 1000 sins!"*

C. Bible examples of it's fruit:

- 1) It brought everlasting disgrace & shame to Judas Iscariot.
 - a) He sold the Lord for 30 pieces of silver.
 - b) John 12:4-6
 - c) Concern for self & not for others.

- 2) It caused a young man to come into great want!
 - a) Story of the prodigal son. (Lk. 15:11-16)
 - b) When he left home—who was he thinking of?
 - c) When he squandered all his living—who was he thinking of?
- 3) It brought sudden death on two members of the church!
 - a) Acts 5:1-10 (Ananias & Sapphira)
 - b) Why did they lie?
 - c) Did covetousness, selfishness still have a hold upon them?
- 4) It caused Israel to rob God.
 - a) Mal. 3:8-9
 - b) Why did they fail to give to God correctly?

II. LOOK AT UN-SELFISHNESS!

A. What is it?

- 1) *"To live so that self is NOT the center of one's life.*
- 2) *"To have a sincere regard for others—their rights, needs, welfare, wishes."*
- 3) *"To live for others, rather than just for self."*

B. Our challenge from Rom. 14:19-15:3:

- 1) V. 19—Do things that make for peace (with others).
- 2) V. 19—Do things that edify others.
- 3) V. 20—Do not use Christian liberty to offend or destroy a brother.
- 4) V. 21—Be willing to forego even good things for good of others.
- 5) V. 1—Strong should bear infirmities of weak.
- 6) V. 2—Please neighbor for his good to edification.
- 7) V. 3—Our example—Christ pleased not Himself.

C. Christ has set before us the supreme example of unselfish living.

- 1) OTHERS was his reason for coming to earth as a man!
- 2) He always sought to please His Father while on earth.
- 3) His program of life was Purposed, Planned, and Executed to benefit others!
 - a) ***"He went about doing good"***—for others!
 - b) He went to the cross of humiliation, shame, suffering, agony, and death—for others!
 - c) He emptied Himself—that he might serve others!

D. The Apostle Paul caught the vision of unselfish living.

- 1) He sacrificed Honor, Power, Prestige in order to become a Christian.
 - a) Phil. 3:7—***"But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ."***
- 2) He sought to do all things to the glory of God.
- 3) But he was also concerned about people.
 - a) 1 Cor. 9:19—***"For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more."***
 - b) 1 Thess. 2:5-13
- 4) He would not even use his rights if it would cause others to stumble or be offended.

CONCLUSION

1. Unselfish living is the only real way to live!
2. Followers of Christ have their challenge laid out for them.
3. We need to catch the vision as the apostle Paul did.
4. No one can live the Christian life successfully—without making a diligent effort to put off selfishness!
5. Are you willing to die to self—so you can live unto God?

Lesson Five

“THE CHALLENGE TO DEAL WITH ‘HARD’ TRUTH”

INTRODUCTION

1. Real concern for people is rare.....but greatly needed!
 - a) The apostle had this concern for the Galatian Christians.
 - b) He showed it by telling them the truth. (Gal. 4:16)
 - c) They were allowing themselves to be led away from the truth.
 - d) They were traveling a dangerous road!
 - e) The truth had to be spoken to save them.
2. But he was also concerned over their reaction to the truth spoken.
 - a) ***“Am I become your enemy because I tell you the truth?”***
3. God’s truth needs to be spoken today, as well!
 - a) It should **not** be spoken with a:
 - 1) **“Don’t care attitude”**
 - 2) **“Take-it-or-leave-it attitude”**
 - b) But spoken in love & concern for souls.

DISCUSSION

I. UNPLEASANT TRUTHS ARE NECESSARY AT TIMES.

A. People should not want to be pampered with soft words.

- 1) Unpleasant truths are a fact & reality of life.
- 2) Nature is not all roses.
- 3) Snakes & Scorpions exist also.
- 4) Pages of history are blotted with tears, blood, & heartache.
- 5) Pampering us only leaves us in sin!

B. Teachers of soft words do not serve the people, but themselves.

- 1) Rom. 16:17-18
- 2) False prophets in O.T. foretold “Peace” to pacify the people.
- 3) They always offered an easier way than God’s way.
- 4) They pleased people, rather than God—to get their own ends.

C. All need unpleasant truths spoken to us at times.

- 1) 2 Tim. 3:16; 4:2
- 2) Peter had to rebuke Simon the Sorcerer. (Acts 8:18-23)
- 3) Paul had to rebuke Peter openly before all. (Gal. 2:11-12)
- 4) 1 Tim. 5:20—***“(Elders) that sin, rebuke before all, that others may also fear.”***
- 5) Purpose—Lead to repentance—cause others to fear!

II. SPEAKING TRUTH CAN MAKE ENEMIES!

A. The truth can be spoken:

- 1) Clearly, simply, and with love and concern.
- 2) With God's Authority behind it.
- 3) And still make enemies!

B. Examples:

- 1) Jesus did! They crucified!
- 2) Moses spoke truth to Pharaoh—threatened with death. (Exo. 10:28)
- 3) Elijah spoke truth to Jezebel—had to flee for his life. (1 Kgs. 19:2)
- 4) John the Baptist told Herod the truth—lost his head. (Mat. 14:10)
- 5) Jesus stated that we would be hated for his name's sake (Matt. 10:22).

C. Such is a common problem of mankind!

- 1) Men want to hear the "Smooth" things.
- 2) They do not want to admit that they hate the truth.....
- 3) So, they turn their hate on the speaker of truth!

D. Men fight truth for at least two reasons:

- 1) Some do so ignorantly.
 - a) Paul fought Christianity "**Ignorantly in unbelief.**" (Acts 26:9)
 - b) When he saw the truth....stop fighting it.
- 2) Some knowingly fight truth.
 - a) Remain in error because they do not love truth. (2 Thess. 2:10-12)
 - b) Truth inflicts pain—do not want pain. (Jn. 3:19)

III. TRUTH MUST BE PREACHED REGARDLESS.

A. Compromising truth only leads away from God. (2 Tim. 4:3-4)

B. Only truth can set man free. (Jn. 8:32)

C. Smooth preaching:

- 1) Leads to moral decay;
- 2) Leads to spiritual standards being lowered—to draw a crowd.
- 3) Becomes a race to see who can make religion the easiest...instead of right.

D. Truth may not be pleasant, but it is still truth!

- 1) There is only one body or church. Eph. 4:4
- 2) There is only one baptism into Christ. Eph. 4:5; Gal. 3:27
- 3) There is only one faith by which to approach God. Eph. 4:5
- 4) There is only one way to God...through Christ. Jn. 14:6
- 5) One cannot enter the kingdom unless born of water and the Spirit. (Jn. 3:5)
- 6) Kingdom of God must be first in our lives. Matt. 6:33
- 7) In order to follow Christ, we must deny self, take up our cross. Matt. 14:26
- 8) etc.

CONCLUSION

1. No amount of compromising will change truth...truth is truth...error is error!
2. Speakers of truth are our best friends.
 - a) They are not flatterers or men-pleasers.
 - b) They do not desire just to gain their own ends in preaching.
 - c) They are concern for souls.
3. Seekers after truth want the truth spoken—no matter how much it hurts.

Lesson Six

“THE CHALLENGE TO DEAL WITH GUILT”**INTRODUCTION**

1. This passage (Matt. 26:20-25) indicates:
 - a) That Jesus knew he was going to be betrayed;
 - b) And He knew who it was;
 - c) And He pointed him out at this last supper together with His disciples.
 - d) The 11 disciples did not seem to realize what Jesus was trying to point out.
 - e) They sincerely asked, **“Lord, is it I?”**
 - e) Judas hypocritically asked, **“Lord, is it I?”**
3. Even though the Lord pointed out to Judas that he was the one:
 - a) It didn’t change Judas’ plans, nor his heart;
 - b) He went through with his plans of betrayal!
4. Asking this question can come from two kinds of hearts:
 - a) A sincere heart—wanting to really know the truth;
 - b) Or, a heart of hypocrisy—trying to cover up our sinful actions.
5. If we were to ask this question of Jesus—which heart would we have?
 - a) *“Lord, am I the one that will betray you? Deny you? Be unfaithful?”*

DISCUSSION**I. WHY WOULD A PERSON ASK THIS QUESTION HYPOCRICALLY?****A. Out of Pride.**

- 1) To admit wrong will lower others’ estimate of me.
- 2) More concerned about my image than my relationship with God.
- 3) Prov. 16:18—***“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.”***
- 4) Prov. 29:23—***“A man’s pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor.”***
- 5) Humility will help us to overcome hypocrisy!

B. Out of a self-righteous attitude.

- 1) Jesus told a parable about such a man in Luke 18:9-14.
 - a) They thought of themselves as righteous.
 - I thank God that I am not like other men—sinful.
 - Look at all the righteous deeds in my life.
 - I could never betray the Lord!
 - b) But these were the very people who crucified Jesus!
- 2) Peter thought this also!
 - a) **“Lord, I’ll never forsake you!”**
 - b) But he denied the Lord three times with an oath.
 - c) And later was faced with what he had done.
 - d) Whose sin was the worse?
- 3) It is easy to condemn Judas’ sin of betrayal.....

- a) And then, hypocritically ask, ***“Lord, is it I?”***
- b) Honestly, have we betrayed the Lord in our hearts & actions?
- c) Did not our sins crucify Jesus just as much as Judas’ did?

II. THREE IMPORTANT QUESTIONS TO ASK OURSELVES:

A. Have I lived my life worthy of my calling?

- 1) The challenge:
 - a) Eph. 4:1—***“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation by which you are called.”***
 - b) Col. 1:10—***“...walk worthy of the Lord...”***
 - c) 1 Thess. 2:12—***“That you would walk worthy of God, who has called you unto His kingdom and glory.”***
 - d) Matt. 10:38—***“And he that does not take his cross and follow after me is not worthy of me.”***
- 2) Should we say as the prodigal son did: ***“I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight, and I am no more worthy to be called your son.”***
- 3) Do the changes in my life indicate true repentance: ***“...bring forth therefore fruits worthy of repentance....”***
- 4) Could the following be said of my PAST LIFE in Christ:
 - a) Heb. 11:38—***“Of whom the world was not worthy....”***
 - b) Rev. 3:4—***“You have a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments; and they shall walk with me in white for they are worthy.”***
 - c) 2 Thess. 1:5—***“...counted worthy of the kingdom of God”***

B. Have I truly placed my service & devotion to God first in my life? (Matt. 6:33)

- 1) Have I shown this loyalty by abstaining from sinful practices?
 - a) Sins of the flesh, passions, intemperance?
 - b) Sins of the tongue & heart....gossip, dirty vulgar speech, undisciplined temper, hate and wrath?
 - c) Using God’s name lightly...without proper esteem or reverence?
- 3) Have I shown this loyalty by the actions of my spiritual life?
 - a) Worshipping faithfully with saints? (Heb. 10:25)
 - b) Continuing in prayer & Bible study? (1 Thess. 5:17; 2 Tim. 2:15)
 - c) Positive teaching & training of my children? (Eph. 6:4)
 - d) Trying to teach Gospel to others? (Matt. 28:18-20)
 - e) Showing concern for sick & needy? (Jas. 1:27; Matt. 25:36-46)
 - f) Am I zealous (hot) in my service to God? (Rev. 3:15-16)

C. Do I fully appreciate the blessings of my past life?

- 1) It is a terrible mistake to dwell on the painful, rather than the joyful.
- 2) We need to count our many blessings.
 - a) We have our daily bread. (Matt. 6:11)
 - b) We have a reasonable amount of health. (3 John 1-2)
 - c) We still live in a great country in spite of its troubles.

d) Most of all:

- We have learned God's glorious truth to be set free. (Jn. 8:32)
- We have experienced the love & grace of God. (Jn. 3:16; Tit. 2:11)
- We are privileged to be among the chosen of God. (Eph. 4:4)
- We can fellowship with God's people as a family.
- We have the promise of God's continued care and love (Rom. 8:28)
- The promise of everlasting reward for faithful service. (Rev. 2:10)

CONCLUSION

1. Back to our original question, "***Lord, is it I?***" (Am I truly dealing properly with my guilt?)
 - a) That has betrayed you?
 - b) That has denied you?
 - c) That has placed you secondary to Family, Friends, Money, Pleasures?
 - d) Judas betrayed the Lord for 30 pieces of silver.
 - e) What has been our price?
2. Or, "***Lord, is it I?***"
 - a) That makes good use of our opportunities. (Gal. 6:10)
 - b) That makes good use of our time. (Eph. 5:16)
 - c) That deals honestly with God and men. (Rom. 12:17)
 - d) That devotes our talents, abilities, possessions into His service.
3. It is important that we honestly ask the question?
4. But it is just as important that we honestly & humbly answer it before God!
5. Do we, like Peter, need to openly confess our failings to God?

Lesson Seven

“THE CHALLENGE TO BE THANKFUL”**INTRODUCTION**

1. When winter time comes:
 - a) It brings cold temperature;
 - b) It brings snow;
 - c) It brings hard blowing wind that goes through you.
2. Poem:

***“Blow, blow, thou winter wind;
“Thou art not so unkind as man’s ingratitude!”***
3. Jesus’ question here: ***“Were there not ten cleansed, but where are the nine?”***
 - a) Has a ring of sadness & disappointment.
 - b) Could even been a sense of hurt.
 - c) But it could also be a strong rebuke for one of man’s greatest crimes—Ingratitude! (Luke 17:11-19)

DISCUSSION**I. CLOSER LOOK AT THIS INCIDENT.*****A. Jesus healed 10 men of a terrible disease.***

- 1) No disease...more dreaded....than leprosy.
- 2) It brings years of indescribable misery:
 - a) It advances slowly;
 - b) Bleaches hair white;
 - c) Body becomes a mass of scabs and sores;
 - d) Joints separate—fingers & toes fall off;
 - e) Nose, edges of mouth, also fall off.
 - f) The body becomes a hideous & awful sight.
 - g) Such are separated off from the rest of mankind.
- 3) 10 such men stood afar off, pleading with Jesus: ***“Jesus, Master, have mercy on us.”***
- 4) Jesus healed them by:
 - a) ***“Go show yourselves unto the priest.”***
 - b) As they went, they were healed.
 - c) Took faith to start to go to the priest for verifying their cleansing.

B. Take a look at the blessings of these 10 lepers:

- 1) Relieved of all this misery, shame, and desolation.
- 2) No longer separated from mankind.
- 3) Go back home....be with family, friends, neighbors.
- 4) Go back to normal pursuits of life, work, etc.
- 5) No longer have to walk the back streets, crying: ***“Unclean, Unclean.”***

C. But only one out of 10 turned back to expressed gratitude!

- 1) The realization of deliverance swelled his heart to over-flowing.
- 2) **“Praise & glory to the great God of heaven for his love and mercy.”**
- 3) He fell at Jesus’ feet—giving him thanks.
- 4) The one who turned to give thanks was a Samaritan!
 - a) He was looked down upon by Jews.
 - b) Yet, he was the one who gave thanks to Jesus.
 - c) The ones we least expect sometimes—do the most!
 - d) The ones we expect the most from—often disappoint us.
- 5) One out of 10—not a very good response for such a great blessing.

II. WHY IS MANKIND SO UNGRATEFUL?**A. *A Lack of Consideration!***

- 1) Thoughtlessness brings thanklessness!
- 2) Did these nine not think about how greatly they had been blessed?
- 3) Isa. 1:2-3—**“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth! For the Lord has spoken: I have nourished and brought up children, and they have rebelled against Me. The ox knows its owner and the donkey its master’s crib; but Israel does not know, My people do not “consider.”**”
- 4) We need to reflect often upon our blessings.
 - a) Recognize the giver and the gift.
 - b) Constant realization of what a great privilege to have heard and obey God’s truth to be saved.

B. *Familiarity!*

- 1) The Jewish people sort of expected Miracles from God.
- 2) But the Samaritan, The Roman Soldier, and the Syro-Phoenician Woman---
 - a) All showed humility and gratitude—As well as great faith!
 - b) There was no familiarity with them.
- 3) We can become so familiar with great blessings that:
 - a) We fail to be grateful;
 - b) We become oblivious to all the good things sent our way.
- 4) Jesus said: **“A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country.”**
 - a) Why?
 - b) Because they are too accustomed to that person.
- 5) **Illustrate:**
 - a) Boy lived on mountain side in an ordinary house.
 - b) Across the valley was a house with golden windows.
 - c) Some day, he would go to see them.
 - d) That day came—he made the journey.
 - e) But he couldn’t find the golden windows—just an ordinary house.
 - f) He asked a young girl, **“Do you know where the beautiful house is that has the golden windows?”**
 - g) She answered: **“Yes, over on the other mountain side.”**
 - h) He looked and sure enough, there they were—it was his own house.

- 6) It is so easy to become familiar with very important things.
 - a) The story of the cross can become ineffectual with us.
 - b) It's moral & spiritual grandeur can lose its luster.
 - c) God's great mercy can be lost sight of—unless we are watchful!
 - d) We can easily take for granted:
 - Our husbands, wives, children, friends, neighbors;
 - Our material prosperity, house, clothes, etc.;
 - Our brethren in the church;
 - The great privilege to be IN Christ with hope.

C. Prosperity!

- 1) God warned Israel of the danger! (Deut. 8:11-20)
- 2) It is easy to accept blessings.
 - a) The 9 healed may have been very happy over being healed.
 - b) But they didn't return to express it!
- 3) Do we have to learn gratitude through bitter disappointment & calamity?

III. GRATITUDE NEEDS TO BE EXPRESSED!

A. In Word and attitude:

- 1) Like the Samaritan:
 - a) He cried with a loud voice his praise to God;
 - b) And expressed thanks to Jesus.
- 2) Like the Lame man healed by Peter and John (Acts 3:8).
- 3) Like the Psalmists: ***“I will PRAISE the name of God with a song, and will magnify Him with thanksgiving.”***

B. But also in action!

- 1) Thanksgiving should lead to Thanks-living!
- 2) What is more reasonable than to serve the one who has delivered us?
- 3) We show our gratitude by:
 - a) Right living;
 - b) Right use of blessings;
 - c) Sharing with others.

CONCLUSION

1. May we fully realize how greatly blessed we are.
2. What a blessing to others to express gratitude in word & deed.
3. Illustration:
 - a) Little girl's dad came home tired, weary, nerves on edge.
 - b) Went into Living room to relax.
 - c) His daughter asked if she could come in. He said, “Yes.”
 - d) She ran, climbed into her daddy's lap began to hug him and kissed him.
 - e) She Said: *“Daddy, I didn't come to ask you for a thing—I just came to hug your neck and kiss you, and tell you what a good, kind, sweet daddy you are!”*
4. Words of gratitude—what a blessing—what a lift of our spirits!

Lesson Eight

“THE CHALLENGE TO GO THE STEP BEYOND”

INTRODUCTION

1. Some of Jesus’ most effective teaching was through asking challenging questions.
2. In Matt. 5:43-48, He is asking two specific questions:
 - a) *“For if you love those who love you, what reward have you? Do not even the tax collectors do the same?”*
 - b) *“And if you greet your brethren only, what do you do more than others? Do not even the tax collectors do so?”*
3. All men do some good...even those considered the more sinful.
4. Many factors encourage this:
 - a) Our family and their affections.
 - b) Requirements of society...Laws of men.
 - c) Rewards of society for good actions.
 - d) Natural affection for other human beings.....etc.
5. But followers of Jesus are called to a higher calling!
 - a) If we live like the world—what challenge is there in following Christ?
 - b) If we only love those who love us—what are we doing more than they?

DISCUSSION

I. JESUS CHALLENGES US TO HONESTLY EVALUATE OURSELVES.

A. Being too satisfied with our lives can be dangerous.

- 1) 1 Cor. 10:12—*“Wherefore to him that thinks he stands, take heed lest he fall...”*
- 2) Lk. 18:9—*“And He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others.”*
- 3) Humility & Honesty pays big dividends with God.

B. Dishonesty & Deception must be dealt with in my life.

- 1) 1 Jn. 1:8-10
- 2) Honesty about one’s self is not easy.
 - a) Can I honestly face up to my desire for the wrong things?
 - b) Am I willing to admit that I am self-centered too much?
 - c) Can I openly admit:
 - I do things to get recognition;
 - I desire power over others.
 - I desire social acceptance—even if I have to compromise.
 - My desire for this world is greater than my desire for heaven?
- 3) Without honesty—I quickly forget these things.
- 4) And the Word of God has no affect upon my life.

II. JESUS CHALLENGES US TO SEE THE NEED FOR CHANGE.

A. Spiritual change can only come when I see myself as God sees me.

- 1) Self-deception tells us we have no need for change.
- 2) Change comes from dissatisfaction of self.
- 3) ***“If you love those who love you—what have you done?”***

B. Spiritual change must use the right standard!

- 1) Humans have a tendency to compare themselves with one another.
- 2) The problem is—we pick people as good or worse than us.
 - a) *“I’m as good as so-in-so.”*
 - b) *“I ‘m as good as that so-called Christian.”*
 - c) *“I’m better than that person.”*
- 3) Humans are really invalid standards!
- 4) Jesus left us an example to follow Him. (1 Peter 2:21)
- 5) His example challenges us to make some needed changes.

C. However, some times human examples are challenging to us.

- 1) When they sacrifice in order to follow Christ.
- 2) When we see religious people who have more zeal than we do.
- 3) When we see others giving of themselves unselfishly to help spread the kingdom of heaven.
- 4) When we see retired people still out there serving in the kingdom.

D. Jesus’ questions can be embarrassing!

- 1) But, they can awaken us to help make some needed changes in our lives.
- 2) They can cause us to re-look at our: Loyalty, Dedication, Goals, & our Heart.
- 3) And constrained us to get up from our “bed of ease” to follow Jesus!

III. INSIGHTS FROM THE QUESTIONS:

A. Jesus is not trying to overwhelm us!

- 1) But, neither does He want us to be satisfied with Mediocrity.
- 2) Any goal less than perfection is degrading of the religion of Jesus Christ.

B. Jesus wants us to realize what it means to be a Child of God!

- 1) It does not involve living like an ordinary man.
- 2) But living like God.
 - a) To be unselfish...denying of self.
 - b) To turn the other cheek.
 - c) To return good for evil.
 - d) To suffer wrong instead of seeking revenge.
 - e) To forgive 70 X 7.
- 3) To get the vision that is spiritually greater than other men.
- 4) To have a zeal for God’s righteousness that is expressed in:
 - a) Not being satisfied with yesterday’s accomplishments;
 - b) And pressing on to greater unselfish service to God & man.

CONCLUSION

1. Jesus' question: ***"What do you do more than others?"***
 - a) Was intended to help us with an honest evaluation of ourselves;
 - b) To help us realize the need of "taking up our cross daily and following Him;
 - c) And to cause us to see the need for change in our lives—for the better.
 - d) To see the need to take that step beyond what good men do.
2. Will or have His efforts been effective in our lives?
3. Let's reach out to the challenge!

Lesson Nine

Illustration: “THE CHALLENGE: WHEN DUTY BECOMES DESIRE”

INTRODUCTION

1.
 - a) A man approaches a school zone.
 - b) He slows down because:
 - He sees a policeman.
 - He respects the Policeman’s power to fine him for speeding.
 - He doesn’t want a fine.
 - c) The next day he approaches the school zone.
 - He doesn’t see a policeman.
 - He speeds through the area.
 - He almost hit a little girl.
 - He is shaken up.
 - d) The next day he goes through the school zone—What did he do & why?
 - He slows down whether he sees the police or not.
 - Why—his heart has been affected!
2. This is what God wants of His creatures: **Heart Service, not lip service!**
 - a) God wants Sincere, Committed, heart obedience.(1 John 5:1-4)
 - b) Eph. 6:6—“*Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart.*”
 - c) John 4:24—“*God is a Spirit: and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and in truth.*”
 - d) Ps. 122:1—“*I was glad when they said to me, let us go into the house of the Lord.*”

DISCUSSION

I. JESUS SHOWED THE DIFFERENCE IN HEART SERVICE AND LIP SERVICE.

A. Scriptures:

- 1) Matt. 23:25—“*Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you cleanse the outside of the cup and dish, but inside they are full of extortion and self-indulgence.*”
 - a) Notice the emphasis upon the outward, but not the inside.
 - b) V. 28—“*But inside you are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness.*”
- 2) Matt. 15:8—(Jesus quotes from Isaiah 29:13)—“*These people draw near to Me with their mouth, and honor Me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.*”
- 3) Matt. 13:15—(Jesus again quotes from Isaiah 6:10)—“*For the hearts of this people have grown dull. Their ears are hard of hearing, and their eyes they have closed, lest they should see with their eyes and hear with their ears, lest they should understand with their hearts and turn, so that I should heal them.*”

- 4) Mark 3:5—*“And when He (Jesus) looked around at them with anger, being grieved by the hardness of their hearts....”*
- B. God obviously wants to capture, woo, and win man’s heart.**
 - 1) He wants heart allegiance, not lip service.
 - 2) He wants more than just outward conformity.
 - 3) His New Covenant has been *“written & engraven on the heart.”* (Heb. 8:10)
 - 4) God wants man’s obedience:
 - a) Not just out of terror & dread of His threatened wrath & punishment.
 - b) But...because we love Him for what he has done.
 - c) And because we desire to please our Maker!
- C. Scriptures that express this thought:**
 - 1) Matt. 22:37—*“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.”*
 - 2) Acts 11:23—*“When he (Barnabas) came and had seen the grace of God, he was glad, and encouraged them all that with purpose of heart they should continue with the Lord.”*
 - 3) Rom. 6:17—*“But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered.”*

II. WHAT CAN HELP ASSURE THAT OUR SERVICE IS FROM THE HEART?

- A. We need to be sure that our wants correspond to God’s wants.**
 - 1) Matt. 6:21—*“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.”*
 - 2) Someone has observed:
 - a) *“The way to be happy is to keep your wants few and simple.”*
 - b) Obviously—there is less pressure to secure things.
 - c) And there is less disappointment in life in not getting things.
 - 3) But real happiness is to make our wants correspond to God’s wants.
 - a) If we made a list of our wants and desires.....
 - b) And then, made a list of what God wants....
 - c) How close would they correspond???
 - 4) Jesus was a perfect example of this concept.
 - a) Everything he did was because He believed it to be God’s will.
 - b) Heb. 10:9—*“Lo, I come to do thy will O God.”*
 - c) John 6:38—*“For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him that sent me.”*
 - d) In the face of death, He said: *“Not my will, but thine be done.”*
- B. By engaging in those activities designed to increase my love for God.**
 - 1) To truly know God is to love Him.
 - a) John 17:3—*“And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”*
 - b) We need to fully come to know God’s nature & attributes.
 - c) 2 Pet. 3:18—*“But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”*
 - d) Why?...to know Him is to love Him!
 - 2) The better we know God—the more likely our service will be from the heart.

- 3) We need to spend time in worship to God with His people.
 - a) God has purposely designed that His people come together for worship!
 - b) Because worship is a way of expressing respect & love to God.
 - c) The more we worship sincerely—the greater our love for God.
 - d) Unless we let it become an outward form only!
- 4) If I go away from worship unsatisfied—not built up:
 - a) Do I like that?
 - b) Is this what worship is all about?
- 5) Which is more desirable:
 - a) To worship God from the heart;
 - b) Or, to just go through some forms, activities, without real meaning?
- 6) Which is better:
 - a) To do God's Will because I have to;
 - b) Or, because I want to and enjoy it?

CONCLUSION

1. Illustration:
 - a) Ran across a story about Abraham Lincoln.
 - b) During the Civil War:
 - He would occasionally visit hospitals to cheer up wounded soldiers.
 - One day, he came to the bed of a young soldier who was near death.
 - He asked the young man, *"Is there anything I can do for you?"*
 - The young man did not know it was the President.
 - He answered, *"Yes, there is. Would you please write a letter to my mother?"*
 - Mr. Lincoln wrote as the young man dictated.
 - c) The letter—*"Dearest Mom, I was badly hurt while doing my duty, and I'll not recover. Don't sorrow too much for me. May God bless you and Father. Please kiss Mary and John for me."*
 - d) At this point, the young soldier grew so weary that he could not finish dictating the letter or sign his name.
 - Mr. Lincoln finished the letter.
 - *"Written for your son at his request by Abraham Lincoln."*
 - e) Just as Mr. Lincoln was about ready to seal the letter, the young man recovered enough to want to read the letter.
 - f) When he got to the bottom of the letter, he was shocked. *"Are you really President Lincoln?"*
 - g) The President smiled and said, *"Yes, I am. Is there anything more I can do for you?"*
 - h) The young soldier made one last request, *"Mr. President, would you mind holding my hand and seeing me through to the end?"*
 - i) He stayed with the young man until he drew his last breath!
2. Mr. Lincoln was a great man with a great heart.
 - a) He serve the people—not out of a sense of duty only—but from his heart.
3. When we serve God from the heart—it becomes genuine obedience to God.

4. 1 John 5:3—*“For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments; and His commandments are not grievous.”*
5. Why waste our time on lip service—we have everything to lose by doing so.
6. Our challenge:
 - a) To work to make **duty** to become **desire** in serving God.
 - b) To work to put our whole heart into our service to God.

Lesson Ten

“CHALLENGES TO SINGLES”**INTRODUCTION**

1. All different age groups in the church have their special challenges.
2. Single people are no different!
 - a) In fact...some feel that some singles face the hardest challenges of all.
 - b) Not all singles are the same:
 - 1) Some are single, having never been married.
 - 2) Some are single, because of divorce.
 - 3) Some are single, because of death of a spouse.
 - c) Each area has it's own peculiar problems to be dealt with in life!
3. I Corinthians 7 deals briefly with all three: Virgin, Divorced, Widowed.

DISCUSSION**I. 1ST, LOOK AT THOSE WHO HAVE NEVER MARRIED.****A. Characteristics:**

- 1) The Bible uses the term “unmarried” or “virgin” to refer to this group.
- 2) We usually do not think of teenagers as being in this group.
- 3) We normally think of young men & women who are on their own.

B. Special challenges:

- 1) Loneliness in a world of homes, companions, families.
 - a) No special one with whom to share our joys or sorrows.
 - b) They bear their burdens alone...go thru life alone. (Not totally).
- 2) Danger of attitude of resentment & bitterness.
 - a) Why me?
 - b) Why can't I find someone to marry?
- 3) Often, a self-esteem problem.
 - a) What's wrong with me that no one wants me?
 - b) Why did I have to be born like I am?
- 4) Dealing with the nosey & curious.
 - a) Why didn't you get married....what's wrong with you?
 - b) Match makers!!
- 5) Dealing with the physical, sexual drive.
 - a) 1 Cor. 7:9—***“But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.”***

C. Advantages of singleness:

- 1) Greater freedom of movement:
 - a) Less money needed;
 - b) Make career changes easier....more time for retraining;
 - c) Move easily;
 - d) Do what pleases me!

- 2) Less complex life-style:
 - a) Fewer possessions needed.
 - b) Involvement in marriage brings more complex life-style.
- 3) Control of time is easier:
 - a) Scheduling is with one person only....self.
 - b) Change activities easily to adjust to new situations or needs.
- 4) More freedom to serve God:
 - a) More time to give in visiting, teaching, encouragement, etc.
 - b) 1 Cor. 7:35—“...*that you may attend upon the Lord without distraction.*”
 - c) Even special service to God, like Apostle Paul, that married persons can not do!

II. SINGLE AGAIN THROUGH DEATH OF A SPOUSE.

A. This is believed to be easier to deal with than being single again thru divorce.

- 1) Death puts a finality to the situation.
- 2) Such do not have the many emotional problems of divorce.
- 3) With death, there is the privilege to remarry, if desired.
- 4) 1 Cor. 7:39—“...*if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.*”

B. But there is a difference even here that needs to be recognized:

- 1) Death of mate when young:
 - a) This usually means young children that have to be raised.
 - b) Often puts a stressful financial burden on family.
 - c) Forced to depend upon family, in-laws, or the state for help.
 - d) Probably more questioning of God in this situation.

“God, how could you do this to me & my children?”
 - e) Faith in God will undergo some real testing & refining.
- 2) Death of mate when older:
 - a) Have deeper ties to cut loose from.
 - b) However, have more wonderful memories to look back upon.
 - c) The financial needs are usually taken care of better.
 - d) After a period of bereavement, can pick up life and go on.
 - e) One of its greatest sadness is having to face the end of life alone.

III. SINGLE AGAIN THROUGH DIVORCE.

A. Characterized:

- 1) Devastating...and it goes on and on!
- 2) Often continued contact with X-mate, through children.
- 3) Numbness settles over person.
- 4) Great emotional, physical, social, and spiritual strains!

B. Special feelings involved:

- 1) Rejection...possibly the hardest to handle.
- 2) Betrayal, hurt, resentment, anger, revenge desired.

- 3) Bitterness, loneliness, self-pit.
- 4) A great void in one's life....no one close to share with now.
- 5) Self-worth damage:
 - a) *"I have failed"*
 - b) *"I didn't make my marriage work" (etc.)*
- 6) Doubts & fears plague the person.

C. Special problems involved:

- 1) Most often....financial difficulties plagues both the man & woman.
- 2) Continued challenge of raising children without a father or mother in the home.
- 3) Or, in case of the man...losing his children...being only a pocketbook.
- 4) Questions that plague both:
 - a) *"Can I make it on my own: spiritually, financially, emotionally, socially?"*
 - b) *"Can I adjust to a new way of life...revamp my life?"*
 - c) *"How will the divorce affect the outcome of my children in becoming responsible, mature, well-adjusted adults?"*
 - d) *"Will I have the strength needed to help myself, as well as them?"*
 - e) *"How well will I handle set backs, disappointments, failures, bad decisions, loneliness, lack of understanding, etc.?"*
 - f) *"What will I do when I can't meet my bills?"*

IV. SUGGESTIONS TO MEET THE CHALLENGES OF SINGLENESS:

A. Turn to God with your whole heart, soul, and mind!

- 1) Heb. 10:22—*"Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith."*
- 2) Turn to Him for: Strength, Courage, Faith, Determination, Faithfulness.
- 3) Face struggles with assurance & trust in God's promises.
- 4) 1 Pet. 5:7—*"Casting all your care upon him; for he careth for you."*

B. Learn to be content in whatever state!

- 1) Phil. 4:11—*"...for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content."*
 - a) Paul was single!
 - b) It was something he learned to live with.
- 2) We must learn:
 - a) That it is NOT the circumstances that determines our happiness;
 - b) Nor what determines our right relationship with God & man;
 - c) But...it is our OUTLOOK!
- 3) It is to accept my lot in life gracefully.
 - a) Whether rich or poor.
 - b) Whether boss or employee.
 - c) Whether single or married.
- 4) We can either resent it & cop out.....
- 5) Or, accept it gracefully, and go on with our lives in God's service.

C. Determine to serve God....no matter what my state.

- 1) We can potentially serve God more effectively as a single. (1 Cor. 7:35)
- 2) Even a single-again person has experiences that are invaluable in helping others.
- 3) Rom. 12:1 applies to us all....”...**present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.**”
- 4) A great sadness!
 - a) I was in a meeting many years ago in Springdale, Ark.
 - b) After the service, a man talked with me.
 - c) He had a very great heartache!
 - 1) His wife had divorced him.
 - 2) He had lost about everything.
 - d) My heart went out to him.
 - e) But my first reaction was....SERVE GOD faithfully! Because....
 - 1) How terrible to have such a devastating thing to happen;
 - 2) And then, to miss heaven as well.
 - 3) So, be faithful to God....no matter what!

D. By all means, look for the good in your life.

- 1) Phil. 4:8—“**Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.**”
- 2) Stay away from Selfishness, Self-centeredness, Self-pity.
 - a) Don’t dwell on your condition...doesn’t help.
 - b) Turn outward to others.
 - c) Gal. 6:2—“**Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.**”
- 3) Dwell on the good things, not the bad.
 - a) Your accomplishments, rewards, successes.
 - b) Be grateful for food, clothing, shelter...no matter how meager.
 - c) Be grateful for children who love you, who try to understand.
 - d) Be grateful for loving parents & friends who stick by you.
- 4) Even survival itself is something to be grateful for under such adverse circumstances....FOR, few survive it spiritually!

E. Deal determinedly with those enemies of inner peace!

- 1) 1 Peter 2:1-2—“**Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.**”
- 2) Eph. 4:31-32—“**Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamor, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice: and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.**”
- 3) Develop a kind & loving spirit.
- 4) Develop a forgiving spirit, so you can have peace within.
- 5) Realizing that out of brokenness can come personal fulfillment & growth.

CONCLUSION

1. But what about the church's responsibility?
 - a) Some of the strongest condemnations in O.T., as well as N.T., are against those who ***“devour widow's houses.”*** (Luke 20:7)
 - b) God continually encourages His people to be concerned about widows & orphans:
 - c) James 1:27—***“Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.”***
 - d) The church collectively has a responsibility to such. (1 Tim. 5)
 - e) The first major problem in the early church was the neglect of certain widows. (Acts 6) (Dealt with!)
2. We need:
 - a) To be there when they need us;
 - b) To reassure them of our concern & God's care;
 - c) To provide encouragement and fellowship and spiritual insight;
 - d) To listen, to understand, to be there.
3. May we continue to be a caring people.

Lesson Eleven

CHALLENGES TO THE YOUNG MARRIED**INTRODUCTION**

1. It should be obvious that God is concerned with all ages in the church.
 - a) He addresses each in Tit. 2. (Also in 1 John 2:12-14)
 - b) Talks to the aged men.
 - c) Talks to the aged women.
 - d) Talks to the young women.
 - e) Talks to the young men.
2. Our lessons are looking at them from a marital standpoint.
 - a) Looking at their uniqueness.
 - b) But also their special challenges.
3. This lesson---Challenges to the Young Married.
4. When you stop & take a look at the young married:
 - a) You can see an exciting and taxing time of life!
 - b) There is adventure, newness, challenges on every hand.
 - c) A part of their Uniqueness is:
 - 1) Their youthful outlook in midst of an adult world;
 - 2) Their freshness, eagerness, readiness to handle a lot of things.
 - d) And well might it be because....they are faced with many great challenges.

DISCUSSION**I. A MOST OBVIOUS CHALLENGE....NEW ROLES IN LIFE.****A. For the young married man:**

- 1) He has never been a husband before.
- 2) "What does all that involve?"
- 3) "How do I fulfill these responsibilities?"
- 4) One who is a Christian should want to be a good husband.
 - a) But such does not come automatically, just because married.
 - b) It is a learning process.
 - c) Hopefully, he has been taught before marriage by a good example from his father.
 - d) But God also offers help that needs to be listened to:
 - 1—Eph. 5:25—"*Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it.*"
 - 2—Love wife as we do our own selves.
 - 3—To nourish, cherish, protect and care for her.
 - 4—Reach out to her in love & concern.

B. For the young married woman:

- 1) She likewise has never been a wife before!
- 2) "What does all that involve?"

“How do I fulfill these responsibilities?”

- 3) If she is a Christian, she should want to be a good wife!
 - a) She too must learn the process.
 - b) Hopefully, she has had a good example set before her by her mother.
 - c) But, she still has to learn for her situation is unique.
 - d) God’s help needs to be listened to:
 - 1—Eph. 5:24—“*Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in everything.*”
 - 2—Tit. 2:4-5—“*That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.*”
- 5) There are roles to be learned by:
 - a) Listening to God;
 - b) Listening to others who have been successful in their marriage;
 - c) By the experience of living together.
- 6) These roles are not dealing with superiority vs. inferiority....
 - a) But, with different responsibilities & obligations.
 - b) With the fulfilling of why God has created male & female.
 - c) To give order and stability to the home.

II. CHALLENGE.....TO GIVE STABILITY & PERMANENCY TO THE NEW RELATIONSHIP.

A. Many things are involved:

- 1) Adjusting to one another physically. (1 Cor. 7:3-5)
- 2) Working out differences. (Eph. 4:31-32)
- 3) Establishing a separate home away from parents.
“Therefore shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.”(Gen. 2:24)
- 4) Developing a trusting, faithful relationship to one another.
“....What therefore God hath joined together, let not man put asunder.”
 (Matt. 19:6)

B. This has become a special challenge in our times!

III. CHALLENGE.....TO BE GOOD PARENTS!

A. To start their training very young.

- 1) Eph. 6:4—“*...bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*”
- 2) Col. 3:21—“*....provoke not to anger....*”
- 3) This involves a great deal of study, thought, questioning, prayer.
- 4) But this training **MUST** be started early!

B. Bringing children into the world requires forethought & preparation.

- 1) Such brings grave responsibilities.
- 2) We want to bring healthy children into the world.
- 3) We want to be unselfish parents.

- 4) Since the child will need a lot of attention....the husband-wife relationship has to be re-adjusted some.
- 5) There is constant care for the baby....added expenses to deal with.
- 6) And then:
 - a) The long range view of the teaching & training needed....
 - b) That prepares them for a useful life on their own.
 - c) To be an asset to society, home, church...not a liability!

C. Quite a challenge to young married!

IV. CHALLENGE.....TO BE RESPONSIBLE PEOPLE IN OUR SOCIETY.

A. Realization....I am a part of a society in which I live.

- 1) This brings responsibilities & obligations & duties.
- 2) Rom. 13:1-7
 - a) Respectfulness to rulers....honor them.
 - b) Obedience to the laws of the land.
 - c) Pay my taxes.
- 3) And...Gal. 6:10—*“As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men....”*

B. As a responsible citizen....I must care for my family.

- 1) 1 Tim. 5:8—*“But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.”*
- 2) My family is not everyone’s responsibility....but mine!
 - a) I freely chose to form my home.
 - b) No one coerced me, made me, forced me.
 - c) It is my family by choice, and therefore my responsibility.

C. Reasons why this can be such a challenge.

- 1) May require a lot of hard work, sacrifice....doing without.
- 2) Requires Training, Learning Skills, Developing my earning capacity.
- 3) It is learning to be a good worker.
- 4) Col. 3:23-24—*“And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men; knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance: for ye serve the Lord Jesus.”*

V. CHALLENGE.....THE GREATEST ONE....TO SHOULDER SPIRITUAL OBLIGATIONS.

A. The tendency is to be overwhelmed with the many challenges...and let this one slide.

- 1) Because the challenges are so great:
 - a) Some things have to take 2nd place.
 - b) Unfortunately, it is easier to shirk responsibility than to fulfill them.
 - c) Tendency, to selfishly get all I can out of this relationship....
But not putting my share into it. (Men)
- 2) Because of such attitudes....Spiritual obligations suffer greatly.

B. The challenges are great here.

- 1) Be a doer of the word, not a hearer only.

- 2) To be an adult...accepting my obligations to God.
- 3) To become involved in a congregation of God's people to the extent and ability that I can.
- 4) To prove to both God & man that my Faith is Real & meaningful.
- 5) That I believe in the value of the Christian way of living.

C. It is a time of establishing basic religious practices.

- 1) For personal devotion & prayer to God.
- 2) For family instruction & devotion together.
- 3) A time for showing enthusiasm and zeal in serving God.
- 4) A time for training, experiencing, growing, following good examples.
- 5) A time to look to the future and plan to be of greater service too.
- 6) Time to be involved now....doing my part.
- 7) Time for establishing basic habits of attendance, worship, prayer, giving, visiting, encouraging others...NOW!

CONCLUSION

1. To many....these challenges are overwhelming.
2. But others are meeting them, and doing it well.
3. If others can, so can we.
4. And the secret of accomplishing them all is:
 - a) To place emphasis upon the Spiritual obligations....
 - b) And the others are easier, more automatic, better prepared to be dealt with.
5. Young married couples have many great challenges.
6. How well are you handling them?

Lesson Twelve

“CHALLENGES OF THE MIDDLE YEARS”**INTRODUCTION (Psalms 54:1-4)**

1. Some of the more TRAMATIC YEARS of David’s life were in his Middle Years.
 - a) He had all kinds of problems with his grown children.
 - b) He had flagrantly sinned by having extra-marital relations with Bathsheba.
 - c) And then tried to cover it up by having her husband killed in battle.
 - d) His problems seem to have multiplied during these years.
 - e) Fortunately, he turned to God for help and answers!
2. The Middle Years have had lots of publicity in recent years.
 - a) Books have been written on the “**Mid-Life Crisis.**”
 - b) Some pass this idea off lightly.
 - c) Others are fully convinced that both men & women go thru a crisis period.
 - d) From observation:
 - 1) It would seem that the Middle Years do possess special dangers & therefore, special challenges.
 - 2) And also special blessings.
 - 3) They even possess Unique Qualities as well:
 - A) Older, but not aged.
 - B) Experienced, Wise, Generally Stable, etc.
 - e) And yet, this is a very volatile time also.
 3. The Middle Years must have it’s special challenges because of the Sayings of Men:
 - a) “*Change is the spice of life.*”
 - b) “*Life begins at forty.*”
 - c) “*You’re as old as you think, and as young as you feel.*”
 - d) “*Age is a matter of the mind.*”
 - e) “*Dress young and you’ll act young.*”.....etc.
 4. The Middle Years can be challenging:
 - a) Take it from one who has been there.
 - b) The challenge is not only to survive, but.....
 - 1) To meet the crisis that come;
 - 2) To meet them in a positive way;
 - 3) And to grow effectively from them;
 - 4) Letting these be fulfilling & satisfying years!
 - c) But especially....a challenge to deepen our Relationship with God!

DISCUSSION**I. THE CHALLENGE OF WORK!****A. For men:**

- 1) His job is his primary emphasis in life.
 - a) It is a means of livelihood for he & his family. (1 Tim. 5:8)
 - b) But a means of satisfaction.

- c) A lot of a man's ego is tied up in his work.
- 2) The Middle years can pose a threat in this area.
 - a) His very age is a factor.
 - b) While younger:
 - 1—If he lost his job or needed to change jobs.....
 - 2—Not as much of a problem.
 - c) But because he is older, it is a factor.
- 3) Middle Years are usually peak years of Expenses.
 - a) Buying a home;
 - b) Providing education for children;
 - c) Fulfilling obligations to family, community, and the church.
 - d) All can bring undue pressures on his finances.....etc.
 - e) Sometimes....bad decisions are made that makes matter worse.
- 4) So, a man's work can be a real challenge to deal with:
 - a) He is too much involved in expenses to change jobs;
 - b) He doesn't want to retrain for another job;
 - c) If he is not satisfied with his job:
 - 1—He feels trapped! Dead-end job!
 - 2—Dreams not to be realized!
 - 3—Down-hill slide for him!
 - d) He can feel very unfulfilled in his work, if he doesn't deal with it.
 - e) He can have the feeling...."I'm peaked out...on the way down."

B. For women:

- 1) Could be somewhat of the same problem of the man...similar.
- 2) But also....another consideration:
 - a) If the children are all about ready to leave home;
 - b) She has lost a great deal of her work & felt needfulness.
 - c) She feels too old to train for a job outside the home.
 - d) Or, she has no interest in working outside.
- 3) That which has given her great satisfaction is now being taken away.

C. How to deal with these challenges:

- 1) A lot of the secret is found in one word....CHANGE!
 - a) Changes come!
 - b) We must learn to change with them!
 - c) This shows our maturity!
 - d) Unwillingness to change can bring heartaches & deeper problems.
- 2) Must recognize a very obvious fact of life!
 - a) This is God's design....that humans grow old!
 - b) Turn to God in the midst of changes for comfort and consolation.
 - 1—This is what David did! (Ps. 51:10-11)
 - 2—Matt. 6:33
 - 3—Heb. 13:5—"*I will never leave you nor forsake you.*"
- 3) We must deal with our pride.
 - a) Prov. 16:18—"*Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.*"

- b) Ps. 118:71—“*It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.*”
- 4) We must find ways of being content & happy in any circumstance!
 - a) Phil. 4:11—“*...for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content.*”

II. THE CHALLENGE OF PHYSICAL CHANGES.

A. General description of changes:

- 1) Most obvious....changes for the woman.
 - a) Usually not a pleasant period of time, nor easy one.
 - b) With stress & strain....it can play havoc for a time.
- 2) The man has some challenges too:
 - a) To work patiently with his wife to help her.
 - b) To deal with the psychological problems that Time Changes are bringing to him also.
- 3) In general...both:
 - a) Have a sense of losing their youth;
 - b) Appearance begins to:
 - 1. Show wrinkles in the face;
 - 2. Extra weight that is harder to get rid of;
 - 3. Graying of the hair.
 - c) Then, the energy supply is not what it used to be.
 - d) Health problems usually begin to show up during these years.
- 4) Some fight the changes strongly:
 - a) They try to hold back the aging process;
 - b) They dye their hair dark, so gray won't show;
 - c) They try to dress and act young;
 - d) They buy sporty cars to feel young;
 - e) They exercise frantically to keep young;
 - f) Some even keep their birthdays at 39.....
- 5) But all will inevitably lose the battle and leave 39!
 - a) Perhaps kicking and screaming;
 - b) But time will take its toll on the human frame!

B. How do we meet these challenges?

- 1) We must accept age and the great things that it can offer!
- 2) We must be concerned with proper care of our bodies, but not overly concerned!
 - a) 1 Cor. 3:17—“*If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.*” (*Sinful Activities*)
- 3) Learn to trust in God's promises:
 - a) Rom. 8:28
 - b) We are in God's hands!
- 4) Take the attitude of Paul and make it ours:

- a) 2 Cor. 12:9—“*And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.*”
- 5) Remember the thing that really counts is the Heart!
 - a) It is not the outward appearance!
 - b) 1 Sam. 16:7—“*...for the Lord seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart.*”
- 6) Wisely choose activities to use energy more wisely.
- 7) Remember that age can bring: Respect, Wisdom, Maturity, Helpfulness, and Experiences to draw upon.

III. THE CHALLENGE OF MARRIAGE & CHILDREN GROWING UP.

A. Conditions faced in the home during this time:

- 1) Unless your marriage has been built on a solid foundation:
 - a) It may fall apart!
 - b) This is believed to be the 2nd most critical time for the break-up of marriages.
- 2) Several factors begin to affect the marriage:
 - a) Financial strain is at it's peak years.
 - b) Physical changes are setting in that must be dealt with.
 - c) Psychological problems of dealing with aging process.
 - d) Sexual changes taking place.
- 3) Divorce or break-up may come because:
 - a) There is a lack of satisfaction in the present situation.
 - b) No longer desire to endure the situation.
 - c) It is considered the easiest time for children to deal with the break-up of the home (There is no easy time!).
 - d) Seeking to find someone to listen and understand leads to deep involvements.
 - e) Open conflicts and less desire to deal with them...brings on greater problems.
- 4) But children can put quite a strain on the home too.
 - a) It is the teenage years, when greatest problems usually occur.
 - b) The break-away-years into adulthood is not an easy struggle.
 - c) Some parents face very stressful situations because of:
 1. Their wrong actions;
 2. Their children's wrong actions & decisions;
 3. Or both!
- 5) When all of these strains hit....something usually gives!

B. How to meet challenges?

- 1) Of all times, this is the time to be closest to God....earnestly seeking God!
- 2) Marriage should be worked at early....to be prepared for these events.

- 3) Children need to be well-trained and prepared for these teenage years.
- 4) Anxiety over children must be dealt with in prayer to God.
 - a) Phil. 4:6—*“Be anxious over nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God.”*
- 5) It is a time of staying true to commitments...no matter what the cost.
 - a) Rom. 12:1—*“...present your bodies a living sacrifice....”*
- 6) It is still a time for growing & improving our lives...NEVER TOO OLD!
 - a) 2 Cor. 4:16—*“For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.”*

CONCLUSION

1. The Middle Years have their share of challenges!
2. But they also have their share of joys & opportunities!
 - a) Grandchildren come along to greatly bless our lives.
 - b) Opportunity to really work at making our marriage the greatest ever.
 - c) Opportunities of leadership roles in job, community, & the church.
 1. Our lives have proven themselves.
 2. Our experience, knowledge, spiritual maturity has something to contribute.
 - d) Opportunity to be of greater service to others. (Gal. 6:2,10)
3. The Middle Years can be:
 - a) Our most potentially productive & fulfilling years;
 - b) A time of our major contributions in life.
4. We need to face the Middle Years as the best of them all...with **Plan, Purpose, & Determination!**

Lesson Thirteen

"CHALLENGES OF THE OLDER YEARS"

INTRODUCTION

1. Quote: *"Come, Grow old along with me, the best is yet to be, the last of life for which the first was made."*
 - a) Growing old is a fact of life!
 - b) But how wonderful to be able to grow old as a Christian!
 - c) To wear out our bodies in the service of the Great King.
2. This lesson—The challenges of the Older Years!
3. One reason why this lesson is so practical:
 - a) Men & women are living longer now.
 - b) There are over 35,000,000 people...65 & older.
 - c) The estimates indicate the number continues to increase.
 - d) Only a small % of these are in nursing homes.
 - e) Means that a lot of older folks are still mobile.
4. The Bible encourages honor to be given to older people.
 - a) Lev. 19:32—*"Thou shalt rise up before the hoary head, and honor the face of the old man, and fear thy God: I am the Lord."*
 - b) Prov. 20:29—*"The glory of young men is their strength: and the beauty of old men is the gray head."*
5. Old age not only has it's uniquenesses, but it's great challenges as well.

DISCUSSION

I. CHALLENGES TO BE FACED:

A. To deal with how older people are characterized!

- 1) *"Here comes old snap, crackle, and pop."*
- 2) *"She is so forgetful, I hate to try to talk with her."*
- 3) *"He is always living in the past."*
- 4) *"They are set in their ways....no need to talk with them."*
- 5) *"He is dull to be around....he rambles when he talks."*
- 6) *"He can't hear a thing."*
- 7) *Etc.*

B. How to recognize you are growing old:

- 1) When your mind makes contracts, your body can't fulfill;
- 2) When you know all the answers, but nobody ask you the questions;
- 3) When you look forward to a dull evening;
- 4) When you walk with your head held high trying to get use to your bifocals;
- 5) When your favorite part of the newspaper is "25 years ago today."
- 6) When you turn out the light for economic reasons rather than romantic ones;
- 7) When you sit in a rocking chair and can't get it going;
- 8) When your knees buckle and your belt won't;

- 9) When you're 17 around the neck; 42 around the waist and 108 around the gold course.

NOTE: Now, don't you honestly believe that overcoming such characterizations would be a great challenge!

C. Things to deal with in declining years:

- 1) The concern for financial independence.
 - a) Not to have to depend upon someone else...children, etc.
 - b) Enough resources to live comfortably.
- 2) The concern for usefulness in declining years.
 - a) The fear and reality of being put on a shelf!
 - 1—Illustrated at the death of Solomon!(Rehoboam)
 - 2—2 Chron. 10:8—"***But he forsook the counsel which the old men gave him, and took counsel with the young men that were brought up with him, that stood before him.***"(Divided Kingdom)
 - b) The loss of strength and often health that brings the need to be replaced.
 - c) Loss of leadership positions that one has enjoyed for years.
 - 1—The time comes to give them up or be asked to step down.
 - 2—To turn over to the younger generation.
- 3) The concern for loss of health.
 - a) Not only lose much of my past strength....
 - b) But, I am often hit hard by various forms of weakening illnesses or outright bedridden situations.
 - c) The fear of being dependent upon others!
- 4) The concern for feeling wanted.
 - a) Unloved, unwanted, "in the way," "don't know what we can do with him."
 - b) Where to live in remaining years.
 - 1—May have to move to new location.
 - 2---Faced with re-adjustments, and making new friends.
 - c) Dealing with a growing sense of loneliness & emptiness.
- 5) The concern for the loss of a companion.
 - a) Sooner or later.... One will leave the other behind.
 - b) How can I cope, deal with such?
- 6) The concern over the coming fact of death for myself.
- 7) In general:
 - a) Dealing with the loss of interest in life;
 - b) The growing tendency to be disillusioned with people & life;
 - c) The tendency to become critical, sour on life, looking on the dark side.
- 8) Yes.... The older years..."**Can be golden years, if worked at, but years of bitterness and self-pity, dark clouds of discontent and chilly winds of sorrow for others.**"

D. To grow old gracefully!

- 1) The Psalmists expressed the challenge in these words: ***"They shall still bring forth fruit in old age; they shall be fat and flourishing."*** (Ps. 92:14)
 - 2) Certainly, God does not want us to fear old age & what it will bring!
 - a) He has told us it will come.
 - b) Ps. 90:10—***"The days of our years are threescore years and ten; and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet is their strength labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away."***
 - c) It is God's arrangement... He has good purposes for such.
 - d) We should not live our last years in dread of what it holds.
 - e) God will not forsake his people!
 - 1—1 Pet. 5:7—***"Casting all your care upon him; for he cares for you."***
 - 2—Heb. 13:5—***"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."***
 - f) Quotes:
 - 1—*"The human spirit is capable of rising above these transient heartaches, conquering the demons of doubt, and holding fast to a saving faith in God's goodness and in His power to save."*
 - 2—*"It is the duty of older people to bear the infirmities of age with becoming patience just as much as it is for youth to flee youthful temptations."*
 - 3) Man needs to grow old with:
 - a) Dignity, Resourcefulness, and Peace.
 - b) To retain his self-respect.
 - c) To dress, conduct himself, keep himself as one in God's image.
 - 4) Even illness can be useful:
 - a) Heb. 12:11—***"Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby."***
 - b) All handicaps can be stepping stones to Honor & Glorify God.
 - 5) We either grown old gracefully, godly, and cheerfully:
 - a) Or, we won't make it to that blissful land where we'll never grow old.
 - b) Phil. 3:12-14
 - c) Paul called himself, ***"Paul, the aged,"*** in his letter to Philemon.
 - d) The letter portrays a beautiful spirit.
 - 6) John Quincy Adams' answer to how he was is expressed well:

"John Quincy Adams is well. But the house in which he lives at present is becoming dilapidated. It is tottering upon its foundation. Time and the seasons have nearly destroyed it. Its roof is pretty well worn out. Its sills are much shattered and it trembles with every wind. I think John Quincy Adams will have to move out of it soon. But he himself is quite well, quite well, thank you."
 - 7) *"To be 70 years young is far more cheerful than 40 years old."*
- E. To still be involved with people!**
- 1) The 2nd great command, in spite of our aging, is to love our neighbor as ourselves. (Matt. 22:39)

- a) Need to be sensitive to others' needs & sorrows.
- b) The greatest is still the one who serves. Matt. 20:28
- 2) Cheerfulness in old age makes it possible to be with, and help people.
 - a) A sour disposition helps to drive them away from us.
- 3) It is especially important to be helpful to those who succeed you.
 - a) To deal with our ego.
 - b) Allow the younger ones to take more leadership, as they should.
 - c) Turn it over gracefully.
 - d) Be willing to:
 - 1—Give them the benefit of your wisdom & experience;
 - 2—Give them encouragement, as well as warnings of dangers.
- 4) Retirement should not be a time of:
 - a) Surrender to lethargy;
 - b) Puttering around;
 - c) Indulgence in trivia;
 - d) Timeless monotony.
- 5) Our time is still valuable... our usefulness not over!
 - a) Eph. 5:16—"*Redeeming the time...*"
 - b) Make good use of your time, applies to both young & old.
 - c) Special instructions to the aged: Tit. 2:2-4.
- 6) It is important that older people listen to others also.
 - a) Jas. 1:19—"*...be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.*"
 - b) Do more listening than talking.
 - c) Don't try to push advice unasked for.

F. Let it be a time of accomplishment for good!

- 1) Of fulfillment, quiet happiness & peace.
- 2) Some of the greatest works of literature, painting, etc., came from people in their older years.
 - a) The A.R. Holtons became missionaries to Korea after 70 years old. (So-Journers)
 - b) J. C. Bailey went to India as a missionary after 65.
- 3) Earl Nightingale observed:

"Not much to do but bury a man when the last of his dreams is dead."
- 4) We need not and must not lose our vision, purpose for living.

G. We need to grow old gracefully in the service of the Master.

- 1) Ps. 71:9—"*Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth.*"
- 2) The real problem is...we should not forsake God in old age!
- 3) We need to be diligent in continuing our walk with God.
 - a) Even into the evening shades of life.
 - b) Rev. 2:10
- 4) Always growing internally, keeping the hope of heaven ever alive.

II. CHALLENGE, NOT ONLY TO GROW OLD GRACEFULLY, BUT TO FACE DEATH WITH GREAT FAITH!

A. Death will come to all sooner or later.

- 1) Heb. 9:27
- 2) For those older in our midst...death seems much nearer...IT IS!

B. The reality of death has a way of making itself felt!

- 1) If not for me...for my mate!
- 2) W. M. Davis' thoughts upon death of his wife:
"Last Monday at 2:30 PM I said farewell to the one who had been my companion on the journey of life for nearly sixty-two years. I am made to suffer the most excruciating sorrow, because we have traveled the road of life so long together, but now I must walk alone."

C. The challenge is to:

- 1) Accept death as a part of God's Plan for me. Heb. 9:27
- 2) To look upon death as a passageway to a greater hope.
- 3) To DWELL on Heaven, not on death!
- 4) To realize the victory we have over death in Christ. 1 Cor. 15:57
- 5) To face death as the apostle Paul did: 2 Tim. 4:6-8
- 6) To more & more loosen my Attachments to the things of this world.
- 7) To be fully assured of God's promises:
 - a) 2 Cor. 5:1—*"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."*

CONCLUSION

1. One of the greatest blessings of the older years is:
 - a) To know that our time of living in this life of toils & tears will soon be over.
 - b) And that we have a place prepared for us by God that is far better than anything this world has to offer.
2. Are you prepared?

