

MY POTENTIAL

AS A PERSON

12 Lessons

Prepared by:

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2004

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Lesson One

“The Challenge to See My Potential”

We often hear the statements: “*You need to feel good about yourself,*” or “*You need to have a good self-image.*” And there is definitely a need for such, **especially with teens!** While this would be a good study in and of itself, we want to go a step beyond this to the challenge for each of us to see our possible potential as a person. We want to challenge each of us to envision what we can become as a person made in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). We want to challenge each to dare to **think, evaluate, project, contemplate** what our possible potential can be 5 years from now, 10 years, 15 years, or even 40 years from now. What do you think you can become or do in the future:

- 1) With your life;
- 2) In **being** and **finding** the right mate for life;
- 3) In getting a meaningful job that can enable me to accomplish good things in the world;
- 4) To become the kind of a Christian that God wants me to be;
- 5) To become effective in the upholding and spread of the gospel of Christ, etc.
- 6) Matthew 5:48—***“Therefore you shall be perfect, just as your Father in heaven is perfect.”***

BIBLICAL EXAMPLE

Possibly no example from the New Testament could help us to see the great potential of anyone that is really concerned than the example of Simon Peter. It seems like that he always spoke up too soon without thinking. He put his foot in his mouth on more than one occasion. Even on the night of Jesus’ betrayal, he was still doing it! Jesus told the Apostles that one of them would betray Him. Peter made it very clear to the Lord that others might, but that he never would (Matthew 26:33-35). And a few hours later, he not only deny the Lord, but did it with an oath! (Matthew 26:69-75). Who would ever think that he would become the Simon Peter who:

- 1) Preached the first gospel sermon to the Jews on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14);
- 2) Preached the first gospel sermon to the Gentiles in Acts 10-11;
- 3) Served the Lord effectively until his death (Tradition says he was crucified upside down, because he was not worthy to be crucified like his Lord).
- 4) Had the privilege to write two of the letters in the New Testament.

Even if Simon Peter did not see his own potential, the Lord did! That is the reason why Jesus called him to follow Him and he would make him a fisher of men (Matthew 4:19). Jesus saw in him a potential to be strong as a rock-like person (John 1:42) and gave him the name to show his confidence in what Peter could become. Jesus had a way of bringing out the best in people, **and He still does today!** The Scriptures are constantly challenging God’s people to become the best they can be. They give us all the instructions that we need to become such as well (2 Timothy 3:16-17). We need to feed on the Word of God, meditate on it, so that it can accomplish its God-given purpose.....**to make us complete in Christ** (Colossians 1:28).

THE CHALLENGE TO ENVISION OUR POSSIBLE POTENTIAL

Vision (the ability to see) is so important in our lives! Without this ability, our lives would be drastically changed. Can you imagine living in a world that you have never seen with your eyes—meeting people that you can never see with your eyes! What a difference it would make! But, could not the same thing be said of us when we fail to look to the future and try to see (envision) what our possible potential could be? A vision of the future possibilities can be important to us because:

- 1) We can know where we want to go or to become;
- 2) It can help to motivate us to work hard and long to reach what I can envision;
- 3) But the opposite is true—that without vision we have no where to go or no one to become.
- 4) It gives us the direction we need to work towards!

When you look at Jesus' teachings, you can see that He was constantly challenging people to envision the possibilities for their lives:

- 1) ***“The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed.....”*** (Matthew 13:31-33)
- 2) ***“You are the salt of the earth.....the light of the world...”*** (Matthew 5:13-16)
- 3) ***“Except your righteousness exceeds that of the.....”*** (Matthew 5:20)
- 4) Go the 2nd mile, Give to him who ask, love your enemy, etc. (Matthew 5:41-43)
- 5) And ends the chapter with ***“Be perfect.....”*** (Matthew 5:48)

Deity envisioned the church from all eternity! Deity envisioned what the church could become—to bring glory to God and make know his manifold wisdom (Ephesians 3:10, 21). We need to envision of potential as a person—think about it, want it, work at it, and become it!

BE WILLING TO SHARE YOUR VISION WITH OTHERS

To share what you envision about yourself can not only be a help to you, but it can serve as an encouragement to others as well. But it is important that you talk about your vision:

- 1) To let others help you to evaluate your vision (Proverbs 27:17);
- 2) To profit by and refine your vision;
- 3) To be sure you are not too far out in your vision—some things can be beyond our possibilities;
- 4) So they can help you to bring your vision into reality.

But your vision needs to be shared with a positive person. A negative person will do more to discourage you. While a positive person can be of great help to evaluate, and at the same time be an encouragement (Proverbs 27:5-6).

THE POWER OF ENVISIONING

In Genesis 9:1, God told Noah and his sons to multiply and fill the earth. This concept was probably passed on to all that came into existence after this. But as man began to grow in numbers, they had a different vision than the one God had for them. Their vision was to stay together. So they built a tower to reach into the heavens to serve as a beacon for all to see and a city in which all could live (Genesis 11:1-9). God's reactions to this was: ***“Behold, they are one***

people, and they all have the same language. And this is what they began to do, and now nothing which they purpose to do will be impossible for them.” (v. 6) They were a united people with one language and with a common vision—nothing can keep them from accomplishing what they can envision.

Unbelieving people can envision, plan, talk about, and agree to accomplish great things—and they can accomplish them. Why cannot believing people envision their great potential and accomplish it also? The secret of accomplishing great things lies in the heart of man. What we can envision, we can do! (Proverbs 13:7).

Gynnath Ford in his book **Power to Become** told about a man at Folsom Prison. A Mr. Doug Hooper was trying to illustrate the power of visualization to the inmates. For a laugh, one of the inmates suggested that Mr. Hooper try his ideas on Eugene—make him into a public speaker. When Eugene came into the group, Mr. Hooper took him aside and encouraged him to participate in the experiment. He asked him to visualize himself as a great speaker giving a talk to these men and then receiving a standing ovation. Eugene sat quietly with his eyes closed for about 30 minutes and suddenly got up, went to the front, and gave a fine talk, and sat down. The inmates never thought he would even get up, much less to do such a good job speaking. They gave him a standing ovation. Eugene was never the same again.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

What do you want to become? What grand thing can you envision for yourself? We know what we don't want in our lives—sickness, poverty, loneliness, rejection, abuse, etc. But do we know, can we envision what we would like to be and have in our lives. What is your potential as a person and as a Christian? The choice lies with each of us.....we have a choice:

- 1) To envision our potential and go after it;
- 2) Or, just coast along without any direction for our lives.

The Apostle Paul had learned to envision himself as a successful and contented person when he said: ***“I have learned in whatever state I am, to be content”***—***“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”*** (Philippians 4:11,13).

Do you see yourself as a dedicated, serving Christian with great potential in the world to do good?

Lesson Two

“The Power of the Mind (Imagination)”

God has given man a wonderful power that can be used for good or evil. It is the power of the mind (to think, to contemplate, to plan, to envision, to imagine). Have you noticed that years ago some of the science fiction movies were considered “far out!” But, how “far out” are they now? What man can envision or imagine he can eventually do—if given enough time, money, and talent. Even our “space-age-movies” of today do not seem as “far out” as those of years ago. It would seem that what we sincerely have an interest in and what we have a natural talent in, that our potential seems to be unlimited (Genesis 11:6). Our greatest limitation is in our minds—which we place there by lack of desire, imagination or effort.

NEGATIVE & POSITIVE IMAGINATION

If men can imagine something and eventually be able to accomplish it (Genesis 11:1-6); then, why wouldn't imagining negative things also affect our lives? Is that the reason why Jesus told His disciples not to **worry!** (Matthew 6:25-34). **Worry** is using our power of imagination in a negative way! What we continually imagine in a negative way could potentially come to pass. Jesus ends His thoughts about worry by telling us what to do—***“Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness....”*** (Matthew 6:33). Put your future in God's care—trust Him! And then, put your positive imagination to work—imagine that you are succeeding and accomplishing good things in your life. While some men have set their minds to imagine evil and have brought great evil on mankind; yet, there have also been men who have set their minds to imagine good and have brought great good on mankind. But either starts in the mind, the heart, in the imagination.

THE POWER OF THE MIND TO THINK

God did not make us robots nor did He make us like the lower animal world. We were made in His image (Genesis 1:27) with the power to think! Our minds can think on many things both good and bad. Our challenge is to think on the good things: ***“Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, dwell on these things.”*** (Philippians 4:8). Why does God want us to think on good things? Doesn't it make sense that what we believe and what we think on determines the kind of life we will live and ultimately the kind of death we will die? God has left the choice up to us as to what we will set our minds on to think on or to imagine about, but he reminds us also that there are outcomes or consequences that comes from our choice.

Who or what determines the kind of life you will live? Is it determined by the people we live close to, or the people down the street, or by our peers with which we associate? It is quite obvious that many people are directed by such. But shouldn't our lives be determined by what God says? This is what He wants! ***“present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable***

to God which is your spiritual service of worship. And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.” (Romans 12:1-2). The mind of man plays a major role in determining our potential before God. If we want to live a godly, dedicated, useful and fruitful life in Christ, then we must fill our minds with the greatest power on earth to make such possible—**the word of God!** (Romans 1:16; Hebrews 4:12). We must let it be our guide to determine our potential as a Christian. We must let it be our guide in the setting of goals to be accomplished to bring glory to God (1 Corinthians 10:31). The word of God must transformed our thinking if we expect to reach our potential as a child of God.

THE MIND’S ABILITY TO PLAN

Not only does our mind have the ability to think, to meditate on things, but it also can envision, plan, set goals that help us to reach our full potential. We have the ability to dream great dreams—even “far out” dreams! We can have our “pipe dreams” or we can have our “reality dreams.” But we need our dreams—we need our plans and goals envisioned out before us so that we can be challenged to reach higher. When we lose the desire to dream, we have lost our interest in living! God has used the power of dreams to help direct His people in accomplishing great things. He called on Israel to see the dream of them conquering and living in the promised land of Canaan. The first generation that came out of Egypt lost that dream and died in the wilderness. But the next generation caught that dream, held on to that dream, and were blessed to see their dream come to reality (Hebrews 3:12-19).

What kind of goals are you setting for yourselves? Have you taken the time to envision, meditate on, and to firmly set in your mind—not only the direction you want to go, but the goals you want to attain unto? Have you worked out an orderly approach with which to attain your goals? We become what we think upon and reflect upon because such usually determines what we say and do. Such efforts can make a difference between success or failure in our lives.

One reason why some young people do not plan and set goals for their lives is—“*how do you know what to planned for?*” They have not had much experience in such. They are not really sure about their abilities to accomplish things. So, it should be obvious that they need to be in the company of more experienced people that can help them to envision their future—not plan it for them, but help them to plan for themselves. Wise advice and insights can be of immense value in helping to get our minds working, thinking, envisioning, and planning. Listen to some words of wisdom from Proverbs:

“The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (1:7)

“Hear, my son, your father’s instruction and do not forsake your mother’s teaching; indeed, they are a graceful wreath to your head and ornaments about your neck.” (1:8-9)

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding.” (3:5)

“How blessed is the man who finds wisdom and the man who gains understanding.” (3:13)

How open are we to listen to the wisdom of God for our lives? How open are we to listen to those older and more experienced than we are? We are the loser if we do not turn to those godly sources to help plan our lives for God.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

What do you think about? What do you keep in your heart? Mary treasured in her heart the things that happened and were said about Jesus (Luke 2:51). It was her way of meditating on them and trying to fully understand all that was happening in her life. Do we treasure in our hearts the things that happen to us and those about us, so that we can more fully understand what is happening in our lives?

What we think about and keep in our hearts will affect our lives! If we think about evil things, what will we reap? (Galatians 6:7-8). If we think about and keep good things in our heart, what kind of a harvest will we have? What we think about, we will eventually become! (Colossians 3:2; Proverbs 23:7). So, imagine good things and great things! Don't limit your life for God by bad thinking—make good use of the power of your mind!

Lesson Three

“The Power of Persistence”

Goal setting is an important step towards a person reaching their full potential. But how can you know what to do if you have no plans or goals for your life? How can you realize your full potential if you have no plans nor preparation to reach it? The primary reason why a person enrolls in college or special schooling is to help prepare him for his life’s work—to help him realize his full potential in such work.

As a teenager, I came to the conclusion that I wanted to be a preacher. My plans from then on were towards making this become a reality. My studies in college were designed to help make this become true. All decisions made were towards realizing my full potential as a preacher of the gospel.

But setting goals is not easy to do—especially for some. It takes time, effort, thinking, evaluating, and others’ thoughts and wisdom to help me formulate such for my life. A five-year-old boy or girl can tell you quickly what they want to be when they grow up. But reality goal setting is not quite that easy. Arriving at a realistic goal for my life should involve at least the following four things.

(1) DECIDE ON ONE MAJOR FOCUS

There are so many opportunities for us to be involved in that it makes it harder to focus in on one major thing. Some people seem to be multi-talented which could make it even harder to focus in on one major thing. Following are some suggested questions we might want to ask ourselves:

- 1) What do I really want to do?
- 2) What do I enjoy doing?
- 3) What do I feel comfortable in doing?
- 4) Is it right, good, and helpful for others?
- 5) Will God be pleased with my choice?

We need to eventually decide what I want to give my life to that will count for something. Once we have arrived at this point, we are ready for the 2nd thing to do.

(2) THINK SUCCESS—KEEP POSITIVE

Remember, what one thinks is usually what he becomes. So think success, not failure! (Philippians 4:13). Place your faith and trust in God and expect to succeed—*“to him who believes, all things are possible!”* So, think of the many possibilities that you can accomplish in the attaining of your goal. Think positive thoughts because there will be plenty of the negatives to come your way. Criticism must be dealt with and overcome if we expect to succeed. Guard against becoming over-confident because of the warning given by the Apostle Paul to the church at Corinth: ***“Therefore to him who thinks he stands take heed that he does not fall.”*** (10:12).

(3) BY ALL MEANS—BE PERSISTENT!

Stickability is a rare jewel in the life of the successful person. Persistence is constantly emphasized in Scripture! Following are just a few that give strong emphasis to this concept:

- (1) Philippians 3:14—***“I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.”***
- (2) Colossians 1:11—***“strengthened with all power, according to His glorious might, for the attaining of all steadfastness and patience.....”***
- (3) Hebrews 12:1—***“...let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”***
- (4) Hebrews 3:12-14—***“Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘today,’ so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end....”***

No realistic goal will ever be reached without endurance, consistency, or persistence in our efforts to attain our goal. Our thoughts, time, and efforts must be under girded by our persistency to reach our goal.

The reason why persistence is so important is because of the things that come along to try to discourage us and entice us to quit. We have to “hang in there!” The road to any worthwhile goal is seldom smooth. And there is always the temptation to quit and give up. The Apostle Paul’s wording was ***“I press on towards the goal...”*** (Philippians 3:14). We need to develop the habit of getting up and going on even if we slip. Falling down a hundred times is worth overcoming if we can eventually succeed. Jesus, our great example, faced many trials and temptations, but He did not let them deter Him from His ultimate goal of redeeming mankind! The double-minded man that is driver like waves on a shore will never reach his goal! Following are some quotes that I believe are worthwhile:

“Cowards do not win the day.”

“Whiners are not winners!”

“It is better to dry the tears, wipe the bleeding wounds, and get back into the battle, if you expect to reach your potential.”

“No one will carry you on their back for long if you refuse to make an effort to walk.”

We never know what we can do until we have tried—and keep on trying. Ask for help (Matthew 7:7). Look for ways to attain. Be determined to win over all obstacles. Don’t give up!

(5) TAKE ONE STEP AT A TIME

Goals are not attained overnight! The ultimate goal may have to have lesser goals towards reaching it. So, it will be necessary to do as a young child—“one step at a time!” until we can walk on our own. The indecisive life is full of frustration and confusion. Let’s learn to make decisions and stick with them to see them through. Rejoice as each step is taken towards the attaining of our ultimate goal. We sing a song that states it clearly: *“One step at a time, dear*

Savior!” We can’t get there all at once. It will take years, lots of effort, and persistency to reach our ultimate goal.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

“Hang on when the going becomes tough until you eventually wear out the demons of discouragement.” The Apostle Paul’s admonition to the troubled church at Corinth was: ***“Hang in there!”*** or ***“Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your toil is not in vain in the Lord.”*** There is a saying: *“To the victors goes the spoil!”* But what determines the victors? Persistence is absolutely one of the attributes that is necessary to victory or success.

Lesson Four

“The Power of Pliability”

The stubborn, the “bull-headed,” the “stiff-necked” person will have a hard time in life! The reason is obvious—changes are inevitable! Things do not always stay the same. Only God is able to say, ***“I change not”*** (Malachi 3:6). The reason why God can say such is because He is perfect, He never makes a mistake. Jesus is the ***“same yesterday and today and forever”*** because He has no need of changing (Hebrews 13:8). The unwillingness to make changes when they are called for can have a definite negative effect on reaching our potential as a person.

The concept in the word “repentance” is change—a change of the mind or will that leads to a change of our actions. Man is called upon to “change” constantly because there is a need for such. But a person may insist, ***“I can’t change my ways!”*** And as long as he entertains such an idea, he won’t change. So, it is important that we make up our minds to make changes when needed. We may even have to make changes in our major goal for one reason or another. Good change is for our good!!

The Scriptures say that Jesus ***“came unto His own, and His own received Him not”*** (John 1:11). Why did they not receive Him? Was it because of an unwillingness to change? One of the saddest verses that Jesus spoke about the Jewish people is found in Matthew 23:37-38: ***“O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, as a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, but you were not willing! See! Your house is left to you desolate.”*** Their unwillingness to change brought about their destruction as a nation and the losing of their souls (Romans 10:1-3).

I MUST BE WILLING TO CHANGE

If change is a necessity, then I should make up my mind to be willing to make necessary changes. Again, we come back to a positive attitude—***“I can and I will succeed, no matter what may be required of me.”*** But someone observes: ***“If I change, I may be criticized by my friends.”*** Yes, you probably will! But what of it? Even Jesus, the perfect person who did everything right, was criticized! Did it discourage Him? Did it cause Him to change His plans to redeem mankind? Even good people who are living right are criticized.

The main reason that I must want to change is because I am not a perfect planner or person. I should automatically know that changes will be called for sooner or later. The Apostle John points this out clearly when he said, ***“If we say we have not sinned, we make Him a liar and His word is not in us.”*** (1 John 1:10). If I sin, I need to change!! It is just that simple. Because we are imperfect people, we will need to constantly make changes to any plans we make. The Apostle also talks about sin that leads to death and sin that does not lead to death (1 John 5:16). The difference between the two is obvious:

- 1) Sin leading to death is where one is unwilling to change his life to righteousness.
- 2) Sin not leading to death is where one is willing to confess his sin and change his life to righteousness.

THE REWARD OF CHANGE

The obvious blessing of change for the Christian who confesses his sin is forgiveness, cleansing by the blood of Jesus (1 John 1:7-9). He also retains his fellowship with God and with his fellow-Christians. Without such change, he remains in his sin. The blessing or reward of the person willing to make proper changes to their goals or lives is the ultimate success of reaching his goal.

Change not only has the power to bless the one willing to change, but possibly it can bless untold numbers of people that he may reach out to to be of help. Change also has a way of making me feel good about myself. I have been created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27), which means I am valued by God. Jesus left heaven to sacrifice Himself so I could be saved—which tells me I am valuable to God. If God says I am valuable, then, I need to see myself as valuable. But one step further. When I do wrong or am unwilling to change for the better, I tend to lose this image of self-worth that God has shown me. It is when I am willing to make proper changes that I can again feel better about myself because I am living up to what God has created me for. Guilt must be dealt with properly for us to see our true value. But changes are called for to deal with this guilt.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

“Therefore you are to be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect!” (Matthew 5:48). God challenges us to constantly make proper changes in our lives so we can be more and more like Him. These changes are necessary because we are imperfect people. But these changes are also necessary in order to reach our full potential as a person—***“to attain unto a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.”*** (Ephesians 4:13). God is challenging us to the highest! But changes, when called for, need to be made in order to reach out to meet God’s challenges in our lives.

Lesson Five

“The Need for Self-Reliance”

“You need to stand on your own two feet?” This is one way of saying that a person needs to take charge of their life instead of being so dependant upon others. Of course, we are all dependant upon others to a certain degree. For instance, we don’t usually go out to hunt and kill the meat we put on our table. We don’t dig for oil and refine it in order to have gasoline for our cars. Obviously, there is a certain amount of dependency whether we like it or not. But we are dealing with self-reliance where we can and should stand on our own two feet. God’s Word clearly recognizes these distinctions:

Galatians 6:2-3—***“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.”***

Galatians 6:4-5—***“But let each one examine his own work, and then he will have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another. For each one shall bear his own load.”***

Galatians 6:6—***“Let him who is taught the word share in all good things with him who teaches.”***

There will be plenty of times when we will be dependant upon others, but we will pay them for their services to us with the money we make by our services to others. However, there may be also times when we have to be dependant upon others and have no money to pay for the service they render to us. We are all called upon to bear our own load as much as possible—to not be too dependant upon others. It is when we become too dependant and expecting to be cared for by others without our doing any service or pay any money that we begin to become a leach upon society.

SELF-RELIANCE WITH GOD

The idea of “taking charge of our life” can be looked upon in two ways—good or bad! If by the expression we are saying that we don’t need God or others, it can be bad! But, if we mean that we have our responsibilities and decisions we need to shoulder and with the help and encouragement of God and others, we will do what we should—this is good!! When Jesus said, ***“The Son can do nothing of Himself...”*** (John 5:19), he was obviously showing that He was dependant upon the Father for all that He did! (5:20-21). Jesus was “self-reliant” in the good sense. He carried out the Father’s Will completely in His life on earth. He did not expect the Father or other people to do the work for Him.

THE DANGERS OF DEPENDANCY

We have examples in the Bible of people not doing what they could or should to be right with God. One of the more obvious examples is found in Jesus’ “Parable of the Talents.” The one-talent-man was afraid to shoulder his responsibility. He lacked confidence in himself to invest his master’s money that was entrusted to him. He was called ***“wicked,” “lazy,”*** and ***“unprofitable”*** (Matthew 25:24-30). The end of such a life is: ***“cast the unprofitable servant into outer darkness.”***

The religious leaders of the Jewish Nation were condemned severely by Jesus because they were not willing to shoulder the greater teachings of God's Law (Matthew 23:23-24). They were willing to do the easier things, but neglected to do the harder, more important things. Such people like to bind heavy burdens on others, but are unwilling to shoulder such themselves (Matthew 23:4).

James talks about the person who claims to have faith, but is unwilling to put it into action. His conclusion was: ***"Faith without works is dead."*** (James 2:24-26). He further illustrated this by saying: ***"If anyone among you thinks he is religious, and does not bridle his tongue but deceives his own heart, this one's religion is useless."*** Professing of religion is not enough, we must shoulder our responsibility to be right with God! Today, as it was then, people are no different! We can put on a good front of being religious, but not really be committed to doing those things that I should.

But there is another side of this picture that we need to see—there is a grave danger of being overly dependant upon God or others. Without the confidence in ourself that with the help of God and others I can do whatever is required of me—I will be continually overly dependant on those about me. I can even be overly dependant upon God! I am expecting for Him to do for me what He has commanded me to do! If I hear God say to me ***"Put off the old man of sin"*** (Ephesians 4:22) and then I say to God ***"Take way these things out of my life"***—would this be correct? Whose responsibility is it—God's or mine? Paul's statement in Philippians 4:13 shows the answer: ***"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."*** He did not say, God can do all things, but that he could do all things! That is being self-reliant with God's help! Paul's statement to Timothy expresses this thought so well: ***"For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound mind. Therefore do not be shamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God."*** (2 Timothy 1:7-8).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Jesus stated it clearly in Matthew 7:21: ***"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven."*** It is those who shoulder their responsibilities and become doers of the Word that will not only succeed in this life, but who will have the promise of eternal life with God when this life is over (Hebrews 5:8-9; James 1:25).

Jesus is the great motivator! He not only helps us to see our worth before God (John 3:16), but gives us reasons to reach out and take hold of those challenges in life and handle them with God's help. He helps us to see our great potential as workers together with God in the greatest work on earth—the saving of souls! (1 Corinthians 3:5-9).

Lesson Six

“The Need to Carry Through”

To be persistent is so important because without such we would never finish what we start. A person, however, can be persistent in something for years, but become discouraged and quit—failing to finish his race! The oft repeated words of so many that failed to finish are: *“What is the use of continuing to do this—no one seems to care!”* A Christian can live a godly life persistently for years, and in later years become discouraged and quit. The Lord’s admonitions are greatly needed to help us see our race through all the way to the end!

Hebrews 2:3—*“how shall we escape if we neglect so great a salvation...”*

Hebrews 3:14—*“For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end.”*

Hebrews 12:1—*“let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”*

Hebrews 12:5, 7—*“My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor be discouraged when you are rebuked by Him.....if you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons...”*

Hebrews 12:12-13—*“Therefore strengthen the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees, and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.”*

Revelation 2:10—*“Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.”*

No one will reach their full potential as a Christian unless they are persistent. But also, there is that need to be persistent to the end—finish the race! It is those who finish the race that win the prize (1 Corinthians 9:24-27). There is a constant need to exhort one another to finish our race in order to win the prize of eternal life.

THE EXAMPLE OF SOLOMON

No man ever had a better beginning than Solomon. He began to realize his great potential early in his life. When he became king over Israel, he saw his need of God’s wisdom to help him to rule the people of God correctly. When asked by God, he made his request known (1 Kings 3:6-14). For a period of time he persisted in righteousness. However, he began to fall away from following God’s Will and began to follow his own will. His heart was turned to idol gods by his foreign wives (1 Kings 11:1-13). He started so well with such a great potential, but failed to finish his race with God.

THINGS NECESSARY TO FINISH OUR RACE

If we are to finish our race with God, then we must learn to profit by our mistakes and failures. This is the way of gaining wisdom and understanding along with a knowledge of the Word of God (Proverbs 2:1-2; 3:13). We come to see the great value of God’s wisdom and accept it as our own guide for our lives. It is a fool who will not gain such (Proverbs 1:22).

Following are some sayings that give recognition to this process of gaining wisdom and understanding:

“You learn more from your defeats than your victories.”

“There is no gain without pain.”

“There is no success without defeat.”

“There is no growth without stretching.”

“Winners never quit, and quitters never win.”

So, the Christian is encouraged to press on to the end! Don't be a quitter! Stay in there and win the prize!

If we are to finish our race with God, we have got to learn to forgive ourselves or accept God's forgiveness. Upon one occasion, Peter asked Jesus: ***“How often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times?”*** Jesus' answer must have taken Peter by surprise when He said: ***“I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven.”*** (Matthew 18:21-22). If God requires of us to forgive like this, surely He is willing to do the same with us! One of the hard things to do at times is to believe and accept God's forgiveness. Forgiveness is the means and motivation to keep on keeping on! Without forgiveness, there would be no reason to keep trying! Our mistakes and failures must become our stepping stones to finish our race and reach our full potential. Forgiveness is an absolute necessity! Accepting it from God and our fellow humans is a prerequisite of finishing our race.

But this race must also be run with patience—patience with God, with others, and with ourselves (Hebrews 12:1-2). Three things are suggested here by the Hebrew writer that must go along with our patient endurance:

- (1) Remember, we have a great cloud of witnesses who have finished the race before us to show it can be done!
- (2) It will be necessary to lay aside any sin that continually hinders us from running.
- (3) We need to keep our eyes on the perfect One who finished His race and made salvation possible for all mankind (John 19:30). Keep your eyes on Him and do not become discouraged!

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Thus far, we have been challenged to:

- (1) See our potential as a person and as a Christian;
- (2) See the power to help us see our potential with the use of our minds;
- (3) See the power of persistence in pursuing our potential;
- (4) See the power of pliability—the ability to make changes for the better;
- (5) And in this lesson, the need to run the race all the way to the end.

One thing we must learn—we can only reach our potential and finish our race, one day at a time. Jesus spelled this out loud and clear in Luke 9:23: ***“If any one desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.”*** Let's set our goal on finishing the race faithful to the end!

Lesson Seven

“Indicators of Our Potential”

What kind of a person do I want to become? What is my possible potential in life? How can I know what my potential can be? How can I know when I have reached my potential? The answers to these questions may not be easily answered, but we can find some answers about our potential in general by several things. In this lesson we will be looking at four things that can help to give us some insights to our questions.

WE CARRY THE IMAGE OF GOD

Why did God let man know that he was created in the image of his creator? (Genesis 1:26-27). I may not know all the reasons that God had for doing so, but one thought would seem to be obvious—He wanted us to realize that we were different and far superior to the lower animal world. He also told man that all that He created was for man’s benefit (1:29-30). He also indicated that man could have rule over all of these things He had created (1:28). Man’s potential can be seen in the command of Jesus in Matthew 5:48: ***“Be perfect as your Father in heaven is perfect.”*** We will never reach the level of God, but we can be more and more like God because of being created in His image. But the very fact that we are in the image of God should give us a sense of value and worth before God. He cared enough to make us a part of Himself or at least like Himself. Just from this fact alone, it should be obvious that our potential is great.

WE HAVE THE GREATEST GUIDE

God has given to His creatures the greatest guide in the world—the Word of God that reveals the mind of God to man—which contains His wisdom (James 3:17; 1 Corinthians 1:21). Several powerful things are said about what the Word of God can do:

- 1) Hebrews 4:12—It is powerful, living, and active.
- 2) James 1:25—It is a perfect law of liberty.
- 3) Romans 1:16—It is the power of God to save those who believe it.
- 4) 2 Timothy 3:16-17—It can teach us, reprove us, correct us, and instruct us in the way of righteousness—so that we can be complete (adequate) and furnished or equipped for every good work.
- 5) 2 Peter 1:3—It contains all things that pertain to life and godliness.
- 6) Etc.

There is no other book that can do the above things. What more does a person need in order to reach his potential as a person loved by God?

WE HAVE GOD ON OUR SIDE

One of the great passages in the New Testament is found in Romans 8:28-39. It is intended to help the child of God specifically to realize the greatest of being a child of God and the grand assurance that such gives us. The following things are emphasized:

- 1) Romans 8:31—God is not against us, but for us!
- 2) Romans 8:32—He did not spare His Son, but freely gave Him up for us all—so we could be saved.
- 3) Romans 8:34—Christ is not only our Redeemer, but He is our Advocate before the throne of God for us.
- 4) Romans 8:38-39—Nothing can separate us from the love of God.
- 5) Romans 8:37—We are assured of victory through Jesus.
- 6) Romans 8:28—We are promised that all things will work together for our good.

Truly, if God is for us, who can be against us? With such a One by our side, who could fully envision his/her potential? Believe it, hold to it, let such assurances spur us on to our full potential in Christ Jesus.

PAST GROWTH GIVES INSIGHT

How do you know you will grow up to be an adult someday? It is obvious. You see it happening all around you. You see it happening to yourself. The very fact that we are growing helps us to see our potential as an adult. But why wouldn't the same be true of us as a person or as a Christian? As we observe growth taking place in the lives of others, as well as in ourselves, we are beginning to get the idea of just what our potential might be. Peter's admonition is for the new Christian to desire the spiritual nourishment of God's Word so that he can grow (1 Peter 2:2). God rebuked His people in Hebrews 5:11-14 because they were not growing and reaching their potential. His admonition follows with: "***Let us go on to perfection!***" (Hebrews 6:1). Growth is an indicator that we not only have grown, but that we can grow even more. The church at Laodicea received a strong rebuke because they felt they had arrived and had need of nothing (Revelations 3:17). But in reality they had much potential growth ahead of them.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

If we are able to get some idea of what our potential might be, we should be encouraged to start envisioning some activities that will help us to reach our potential—especially as a Christian. Gynath Ford in his book on **Power to Become** gave a list of suggestions that would be worthwhile to begin your list of things to do (Pages 68-69):

- 1) I will read one page in the Bible today.
- 2) I will say a kind word to someone today.
- 3) I will pray to God at 6:30 AM today.
- 4) I will take out the garbage today.
- 5) I will make up my bed today.
- 6) I will be on time for school or work today.
- 7) I will smile at someone who doesn't smile at me first, today.
- 8) I will do my homework today.
- 9) I will talk to a shut-in today.
- 10) I will brush my teeth twice today.
- 11) I will say something encouraging to my mate today.
- 12) I will compliment someone at work or school today.
- 13) I will work with a cheerful spirit today.
- 14) I will compliment my children or parents today.

- 15) I will say "I love you" to someone today.
- 16) I will give a tract to someone this week.
- 17) I will pray for my critics today.
- 18) I will listen to the teacher today.
- 19) I will walk one mile today.
- 20) I will pay my debts on time.
- 21) I will share some good news with someone today.
- 22) I will write a letter to my grandparents today.
- 23) I will thank my parents today.
- 24) I will give thanks to the one who prepared the food today.
- 25) I will say an encouraging word to the waitress in the restaurant today.
- 26) I will give thanks to God for my food at every meal.
- 27) I will say an encouraging word to a teen once each week.
- 28) I will rejoice and be glad when I awaken each day.
- 29) I will count my blessings when I pillow my head each night.
- 30) I will listen to others before speaking today.

Lesson Eight

“Imitating the Great and the Good”

Whom do you think highly of? What persons would you look upon as your ideal person to emulate? Who is your hero? Who is your “Knight in shining armor?” Children start forming their ideas of heroes early in life. If you were to ask them what they wanted to be when they grew up, they would probably say: “*I want to be a fireman,*” because he knows one that he admires. Whether consciously or unconsciously, we all have people whom we like and would like to imitate. We all have lived long enough to realize the great value of examples set before us and the impact that such can have on our lives. Examples have a way of setting the standard to which we would like to attain.

BIBLICAL EMPHASIS ON EXAMPLES

The first emphasis on following examples in the New Testament books can be found in the Gospels. When Jesus called His disciples, He said “***Follow me!***” (John 1:43; Matthew 4:19). He became their master, their teacher, their example to follow. This same concept is repeated in the letters to Christians, such as:

- 1) 1 Peter 2:20-24—Christ set us an example that we should follow in our lives also.
- 2) 1 Corinthians 11:1—Paul urged Christians to follow him as He follow Christ.

Leaders in the church are urged to be examples before the church:

- 1) 1 Peter 5:3—Elders are urged to be examples to the flock of God.
- 2) Hebrews 13:7—God’s people are urged to follow their example.
- 3) 1 Timothy 4:12—Preachers are to be an example to the church.
- 4) Philippians 3:17; 4:9—Apostles were examples for Christians to follow.

Churches and individuals were to serve as examples for others to follow.

- 1) 1 Peter 3:1-2, 5-6—Wives of unbelieving husbands were to be examples of godly living.
- 2) 1 Thessalonians 1:6-7—Churches even became examples for others to follow.

This concept of setting proper examples and following proper examples is a constant theme throughout the New Testament.

But the New Testament also has its emphasis upon not following certain examples, either by direct statement or inferred. Notice the following:

- 1) 1 Peter 4:1-5—Christians are no longer to follow worldly examples of living.
- 2) 2 Peter 2:1-2, 15—Not to listen to or follow the examples of false teachers who go the way of Balaam.
- 3) 2 John 9-11—We are not to receive false teachers into our homes, nor greet them—less we become identified with them.

Unfortunately, some Christians will be misled by false teachers into turning from the truth and/or turn to ungodly living—which is sad! But the warning has been given to beware of such. Following the wrong examples can end in terrible consequences for us. But because we have been given free will, we make our own choice.

THE GREAT EXAMPLE

Obviously, to the Christian, there is no greater example to follow than Jesus the Christ. None can or have surpassed Him. His example as a teacher of God's Truth; His example in the way He conducted His life; His example in the midst of suffering and death; and His willingness to be a servant to mankind—all stand out as the ultimate for all to follow. But none of us have been around Jesus—except through the eye of faith. This is probably the reason why emphasis is placed upon others besides Jesus becoming an example for us to see.

Jesus chose twelve men to be special followers (which He called, Apostles). He was not only constantly teaching the people, but His Apostles as well, how to conduct their lives before God. But teaching alone was not enough—He had to set an example before them by His life. One of His efforts to help teach a lesson on servanthood came on the night of His betrayal. He took a towel and washbasin and washed the disciples' feet. Here was their "Lord and Master" doing the work of a slave. He then pointed out to them: ***"If I then, your lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you."*** (John 13:14-15).

We have a saying that has been used quite often in connection with what influences people: *"I had rather see a sermon than hear one."* This clearly points out the greater effectiveness of a worthy example in the lives of good people than in what they may have to say. Jesus certainly furnished His disciples, then and now, with examples fully worthy of emulating.

WE TEND TO IMITATE OTHERS

Humans generally do not like to be different from others about them. This is one of the reasons why peer pressure works so well! But occasionally someone will have the courage to step out and be different in such a way that it has an influence upon people. Sometimes, it is a good example to follow—sometimes, it is a bad example NOT to follow! Of course, the ideal is to imitate the best that we see in people, and avoid being influences or following the bad.

When we stop to evaluate our actions and ask why we act as we do, much can be laid at the feet of those we appreciate, admire, or want to be like. Even being given certain names puts a lot of pressure on the person to live up to that name. Look at your parents, teachers, classmates, friends, relatives, religious leaders, Bible class teachers, etc., and see how they have impacted your life for the better or worse.

SUCCESS BY IMITATION

Do you want to be a success in life—much will depend upon whom you associate with. Whatever you want to succeed in, in life, find people already successful in such and emulate them. Do you want to be a good teacher, then, find a good teacher to serve as a role model for you and duplicate their best qualities. We not only have Jesus as our example, but we have His followers as well to be good examples for us. When Jesus said to His disciples, ***"You are the light of the world,"*** it was evident that Jesus was the real light of the world (John 1:9), and their

association with Him would help them to reflect this true light unto others. He was their example to be imitated.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

It is important that we choose well those we would emulate. Don't be satisfied with mediocre, but select the best, so you can be challenged to greater heights. The Christian is constantly being changed into the image of the Lord if that is what he has set his mind and heart upon (2 Corinthians 3:18). The transforming power of Jesus is evident in the lives of those whom have Him as their example to follow.

Lesson Nine

“Giving and My Potential”

There is something special about giving! Jesus indicated this when He said: ***“It is more blessed to give than to receive”*** (Acts 20:35). As much as we all like to receive gifts, Jesus said it is far better to be on the giving side than the receiving side. Not only did Jesus teach this, but He exemplified this principle by His own giving. No one questions the fact that He is the greatest giver of all. But.....if it is more blessed to give than to receive, then why isn't the world full of givers? There is no doubt many givers in the world, but there certainly is plenty of room for many more!

KINDS OF GIVING

Normally, when someone speaks of giving, we usually assume he is talking about money. Yet, all of us know that there are more ways of giving than just money. There is: (1) the giving of one's possessions, (2) the giving of one's time, (3) the giving of one's talents, and (4) the giving of one's self. There are occasions that may require one or all of these forms of giving. But any way that we give can bring a greater blessing to us than if we were on the receiving end. When talking about giving, it is important that other factors be included such as: attitude in giving, the percentage in giving, and proper giving.

THE GIVING OF SELF

Of the four different ways we can give, this one (the giving of self) is probably the hardest and the most challenging for us. Jesus stated clearly in His rebuke to the Jewish religious leaders that giving of one's possessions is not the weightier giving—rather, giving justice, mercy, and faith qualify as the greater (Matthew 23:23). However, we believe the greatest giving is the giving of one's self. Jesus told those who would become His disciples that they must be willing to practice this giving.

- 1) Matthew 16:24-25—Deny self—lose own life.
- 2) Luke 14:27—We must bear our cross—leads to our death!
- 3) Luke 14:33—We must forsake all.
- 4) Romans 6:1-2—We must die to the way of sin.
- 5) Romans 6:6—The old man of sin must be crucified.
- 6) Romans 6:8—We must die with Christ.
- 7) Etc.

The old man of sin must be given up in order to follow Christ (Ephesians 4:22). We literally give up our will in order to do the Will of God. We become a new creature to walk in newness of life (Romans 6:4). We no longer offer the members of our body as instruments of sin, but now offer them as instruments of righteousness (Romans 6:19). Jesus becomes the Lord of our life—He is our Master to whom we submit (John 13:14). Whatever He says, we will do! Where He leads, we will follow! Without this giving, a person cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, cannot be a Christian, he cannot be a follower of Christ (Matthew 18:3; 16:24-25).

GIVING AND MY POTENTIAL

The question may be asked, “What does giving have to do with our potential?” May I suggest to you that it has much to do with our reaching our potential. Notice that Jesus said that givers are the greater blessed (Acts 20:35)! The more we give then, the greater the blessing, and the more we reap (2 Corinthians 9:6). The proper giver is promised also to have sufficient in all things and an abundance for every good work (2 Corinthians 9:8-10). Notice verse 10 in particular—abundant giving increases the fruit of your righteousness, bringing thanksgiving to God. The more we learn to give, the greater is the fruits of righteousness that is produced. Our potential enlarges as our giving enlarges (Luke 6:38). Those who leave all to follow Jesus are promised rewards here as well as hereafter (Mark 10:29-30). Jesus, in the Sermon on the Mount, challenges His followers to go beyond the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees (Matthew 5:20). In what way are we to do this?

- 1) Give love to those who hate you.
- 2) Offer prayers for those who oppose you.
- 3) Do good to those who mistreat you.
- 4) Extend mercy to those who offend you.
- 5) Give kindness to the unthankful (Luke 6:27-37).

This kind of giving will produce a greater person—a more mature person—a person that makes the world a better place in which to live. So, if:

- 1) We want to receive kindness, give it.
- 2) We want to receive a smile, try smiling.
- 3) We want forgiveness, forgive.
- 4) We want sympathy, sympathize.
- 5) We want friends, be one.
- 6) We want to make more money, give more service.

Jesus said that we reap what we sow! But even more than we sow! That is the way God has designed things. One seed produces many seed that continues to multiply. So, our potential as a giver is really far greater than we may have realized.

CHALLENGE TO GROW IN GIVING

The church at Corinth was challenged by God to grow in the grace of giving (2 Corinthians 8:7)—that is, to extend yourselves—see your greater potential as a giver. That same challenge is passed on to us as well. But, the greatest challenge we face is the willingness to give of ourselves. The Macedonians understood this and gave us an example of such. They first gave themselves to the Lord and then they gave generously to help others (2 Corinthians 8:1-7).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

There are various ways to give! There are various amounts we can give! God’s people are challenged to learn to give as God has given so that He can bless us with more to give (2 Corinthians 9:6). Giving plays a major role in our development as a person. Our potential is great—we need to envision it and begin to develop to maturity.

Lesson Ten

“Challenge to Share the Gospel”

The Gospel is God’s power to save those who believe it (Romans 1:16). Unless there are those who are willing to share it with others, they may never know of the salvation made possible in Christ (Romans 10:11-17). This faith has to come from hearing the Word of God, so someone must speak to others this message of hope. Our potential as a sharer of the Gospel needs to be envisioned and developed just as other areas of our life. People do not just automatically become great sharers. They have to be developed over a period of time. And there has to be the willingness to be developed to become great sharers of the Word of God. There are three “C’s” that must be in our lives if we are to develop in our ability to share the message of Christ.

CONVICTION

What do you believe about people being lost or saved? Do you understand that people are lost without Christ in their life? If you do not believe people are lost, then you can have no message of salvation to offer them. We must be convicted:

- 1) That people need to hear the Gospel of hope because they are in a hopeless condition without Christ (Matthew 28:18-20).
- 2) That the Gospel is the only means of informing them of why they are lost and how they can be saved (Romans 1:16).
- 3) That rejection of the Gospel leaves the person in a condemned condition (Mark 16:15-16).

Without these convictions, we have no message to speak. But with these convictions, we not only have a message for lost mankind, but we should be busy trying to get this message out to all who are willing to listen.

COMPASSION

To speak to others about so serious a matter may not be easy at first, but with a love and compassion for them to be saved, we will find the strength to get the message out. This compassion can be built by realizing what it will be like to be lost eternally and what heaven will be like for the saved. Jesus used some very vivid terms to help people see their need of salvation and what it means to be saved:

- 1) Matthew 10:28—“*...fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*”
- 2) Matthew 13:49-50—“*...separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.*”
- 3) Matthew 25:41—“*...Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*”
- 4) Matthew 25:46—“*These will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*”
- 5) John 14:1-3—“*In my Father’s house are many mansions....I go to prepare a place for you....*”

Both the fear of punishment as well as the promise of reward to the faithful were used by Jesus to encourage people to act upon what they had been taught.

COMPELLING

The Apostle Paul say that God’s love was what compelled him to share the Gospel with so many people (2 Corinthians 5:14). If we have the convictions and the compassion for people, we will be compelled to act—do what we can do! Our potential in sharing the Gospel needs to be developed by at least four things that we can make use of in reaching out to others.

- 1) Find common ground. Jesus open doors of opportunity with new people by something in common. The woman at the well had many things different from Jesus, but they had one thing in common—a need for water. From this commonness, Jesus was able to offer her “living water”—which resulted in her becoming a follower.
- 2) Talk about what people enjoy. People like to talk about many things, but four things in particular: (1) Their family; (2) Their job; (3) Their fun activities; (4) and their possessions. It is generally easy to get a person to talk about their children or grandchildren; their work; their recreation activities; or their fine car, or house, etc. The purpose is to establish a relationship, if possible, that will lead to an opportunity to share with them their greatest need—salvation.
- 3) Ask questions. It is easy to get to know people by asking questions that they would enjoy answering. Jesus asked questions often in His efforts to reach out to people (John 5:6; 9:35; Luke 10:26). In each case the question opened the door for further actions.
- 4) Pray for them. Begin a prayer time for the person(s) you are trying to get an opportunity to study with. People may even need to know (when appropriate) that you are praying for them. Especially would this be true if in your discussion they opened up an area of their life where prayer was needed.

Let’s go into the marketplace, hospitals, homes, prisons, schools, vacation places, etc., anywhere there are people and share the Gospel with them.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Our potential in sharing the Gospel with others is unlimited! Once we begin to reach people, we do not want to stop, but rather to reach more and more. We never know how many people we can be used by God to reach—but hopefully, for their sakes, it will be many! We all, working together, can do our part in helping to get the Gospel out to all mankind.

Lesson Eleven

“Commitment and My Potential”

These are many accusations thrown into the face of Christians—such as: “Too many are lukewarm disciples,” “Too many are materialistically-minded;” “Christians are indifferent to the crosses to be borne to follow Christ;” “Professed Christians are impossible to be aroused from their comforts;” “Too many are more concerned about what do I get, rather than what can I give to Christ and His Cause.” Just how accurate do you feel these accusations are? If they are accurate, then to what extent would you say they are accurate? What about the church worldwide? What about the congregation you attend? What about your life and mine? This lesson is designed to spend some time discussing some questions that hopefully cause us to think carefully about our Commitment to Christ in relationship to my potential.

QUESTIONS:**1. How would you define Commitment?**

- a) Ps. 37:5—“*Commit your way to the Lord, trust also in Him, and He shall bring it to pass.*”
- b) Rom. 12:1—“*I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service.*”
- c) “To yield one’s self wholly to God.”
- d) “To give one’s self to someone or something.”
- e) Acts 27:40—“*And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea...*”
 - Let the Sea take them where it would.
 - Put their lives into the hands of the Sea.
- f) Matt. 6:19-21—Where is your heart?
 - When our heart is really in something—we put forth the effort.
 - Like owning our own business—time & effort.
- g) Col. 3:22-23

2. What makes a committed person in your view and God’s view?

- a) Would you consider an insincere person a committed person? (Jn. 4:24; Heb. 11:6)
- b) Would you consider an indifferent and unconcerned person committed? (Gal. 6:10)
- c) Does commitment to God require a completely surrendered heart? (Matt. 22:37)
- d) Does a committed heart mean automatically a committed life?

3. Can a Christian be committed to more than one thing or person?

- a) What does it mean you cannot serve God and Mammon? (Matt. 6:24)
- b) Can we be committed to our parents or children and to God also? (Lk. 14:26)
- c) Can we be committed to ourselves as well as to God? (Matt. 16:24)
- d) Can we be committed to false religion and to God? (2 Thess. 2:11-12)
- e) Is it correct to use the expression—“My primary commitment?” (Matt. 6:33)

f) Is a half-hearted religion a commitment? (Rev. 3:16)

4. What are some Bible examples of committed lives?

- a) Christ. (Jn. 4:34)
- b) The apostles:
 - How committed at first were they?
 - Did they follow Christ willingly at first?
 - Were they more committed later in life or more mature in commitment?
- c) Early Christians:
 - Jewish Christians:
 - 1) Turned back on former religions and friends.
 - 2) As need arose sold possessions to share with fellow-Christians.
 - 3) Suffered willingly—loss of job, houses, possessions, cast into prison, death!
 - Gentile Christians:
 - 1) Turned from idols to living God.
 - 2) Turned from family and friends.
 - 3) Suffered patiently under persecution.
 - 4) When brethren had need—gave out of deep poverty.
- d) Apostle Paul:
 - Why was he so committed?

5. What causes such commitment?

- Faith in God.
- Open heart to God.
- Sense of debt and gratitude.
- Recognition of our true purpose for being here.
- Spiritual growth.
- See the need.
- Reading or hearing about others who have given themselves.
- Above all-wanting to serve God pre-eminently.

6. What are hindrances to Commitment?

- Parable of the Sower (Matthew 13:18-23)
- Heb. 3:12-19

Lesson Twelve

“Why be a Christian?”

At one time in Jesus' public ministry He was at the height of His popularity among the people. Everyone was coming to Him, following after Him—little children, people to be healed, religious leaders, rulers, etc. Upon this occasion, a rich young ruler came to Jesus. (Luke 18:18-30). Mark's Gospel said, ***"he ran and kneeled to him."*** He was very respectful to Jesus. He asked Jesus a very important question: ***"Good Master, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?"*** His reply to the young man was: ***"Keep the commandments."*** The Ruler's reply shows his enthusiasm to do right, ***"All these have I kept from my youth up."*** Mark's Gospel points out that ***"Jesus loved him."*** He was drawn to him. He saw what he was and what he could become—his potential. But He saw a big obstacle in his way. Jesus then said to him: ***"Yet you lack one thing: sell all that you hast, and distribute unto the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven: and come follow me."***

- 1) God had a rival in his heart....His possessions.
- 2) His willingness to give them up would have proven his desire for eternal life.
- 3) He wasn't ready to make that sacrifice.
- 4) Jesus' statement caught him off-guard.

The young man went away sorrowfully—not with arrogance and pride, nor ridiculing Jesus; but evidently realizing what Jesus said was true, and he was not willing to pay the price.

This incidence brought about a reaction of Jesus' close disciples. They had observed, listened, and saw an unwillingness on the part of the young ruler. But they also realized that they had been willing to pay the cost. ***"Lo, we have left all, and followed you."*** They possibly needed reassurance from Jesus.

- 1) They had burned their bridges behind them.
- 2) They had left all.
- 3) What value is that to us?

Jesus' answer shows the real meaning and appeal of true Religion. ***"Verily I say unto you, there is no man that hath left house, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands, for my sake, and the gospel's, but he shall receive an hundredfold now in this time, houses, and brethren, and sisters, and mothers, and children, and lands, with persecutions; and in the world to come eternal life."***

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO RECEIVE A HUNDREDFOLD?

Does it involve each day being filled with bliss, ecstasy, beauty, ease and contentment? This is what many desire & think. But we demand too much---we want heaven here, now---not after a while. Sin is going to take its toll on our lives regardless. It will bring pain, sorrow, work, sickness, tears, etc. No one can have heaven on earth!

Does it involve having more material blessings because we have given up some? This is what many expect....and are often told! The reasoning goes like this---"*I'll show my willingness to*

to sacrifice some, so I can get much more in the long run." Is this what Jesus was promising? Look at the Apostles:

- a) Did they get more possessions?
- b) No such indication!
- c) They traveled constantly with Jesus...and into all the world.
- d) All gave their lives in service to Jesus...without possessing much of anything.
- e) They even went hungry at times.
- f) They endured persecution.
- g) All gave their lives in cruel deaths for Jesus.

Does this sound like more material blessings?

Have you and I found the hundredfold life of the Christian, yet? Have we learned that it pays to serve Jesus? Have we, like the man finding the expensive pearl, sold all to possess the kingdom of God? Most of us have:

- a) Attended many worship assemblies in our life-time.
- b) Heard no telling how many hundreds of sermons.
- c) Heard many, many prayers, songs, exhortations, etc.

Have we learned from all of this yet... what the hundredfold life is? Of what does it consist?

- 1) It certainly seems to be more than just existence.
- 2) *"You will receive something far more valuable than these earthly things."*
- 3) The way we will be able to look upon things will make the difference.

Men's efforts to express the thought are:

- a) *"The value of human life depends more on the quality than the quantity."*
- b) *"Life's more than breath and the quick round of blood;
It is a great spirit and a busy heart.
We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.
We should count time by heart-throbs.
He most lives who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best."*
- c) *"One crowded hour of glorious life is worth an age without a name."*

Jesus is saying that if we truly give ourselves up for Him, to follow Him: We will receive something in this life more valuable, more desirable, than all the benefits these earthly things can bring—even with persecution. Our natural desires for happiness, security and adventure in living will be greatly satisfied. We will be able to see that it is well worth the price to be paid!

WHAT ARE THE REWARDS OF THE HUNDREDFOLD LIFE?

We can have the joy of the assurance of salvation from sin.

- 1) Realization that we do not have to pay the penalty of our sins.
- 2) That we have a Creator that truly loves us and is concerned for us.
- 3) That we no longer are under condemnation in this life.
- 4) Great burdens are lifted....Freedom from bondage to sin!

We can have the Joy of our new relationship with God.

- 1) God is now our Great, Eternal Father... who will see after us.
- 2) That Jesus is our continual High Priest, who ever lives to make intercession for us.
- 3) That the Holy Spirit wishes to be my guide and comfort in this life.

We can have the Joy of having so many new loved ones in Christ.

- 1) I have many fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters.
- 2) There are many who will willingly help me in times of distress and anguish and need.
- 3) Even to the laying down of their lives for me.

We can experience Joy even in the very endurance of persecution for Jesus.

- 1) Acts 5:41—"*And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name.*"
- 2) Acts 16:19-25
- 3) The secret of the meaningfulness of life: "***FINDING A CAUSE WORTH SACRIFICING & DYING FOR.***"

We can have Joy in knowing we are useful in the hands of God.

- 1) The blessedness of knowing I am worshipping, serving, & glorifying my Maker.
- 2) That I am no longer fighting against God, and the Spirit of God; but I am in cooperation with God in fulfilling His purposes in my life.
- 3) Realization that I am in the greatest battle of all;
 - a) The fight against sin, wickedness, powers of darkness.
 - b) The fight to win a soul from the hold of Sin & Satan.
 - c) It isn't an easy struggle:
 1. The battle is hard fought at times.
 2. No promised victory in each case.
 3. Because so often the human heart says no.
 4. Fighting against very real enemies.
 5. Who put up great struggle.
 - d) But the Joy comes when one soul is turned to God from sin.
- 4) The satisfaction in knowing My Life does count for good in this life.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Jesus promised an hundredfold life to those who give up all to follow Him. If we haven't found it, it is not Jesus' fault. He does not lie! Unfortunately, some have just enough religion to make life miserable, a burden, and a weariness. Such does not secure God's favor, nor give satisfaction. But the devoted, surrendered servant of Jesus: (1) Who is deeply engaged in His service; and (2) Who finds manifold more of blessedness than his losses does find deep satisfaction. God gives far more than he takes away. Just like the Rich Young Ruler:

- a) Such a sacrificial life did not seem too inviting;
- b) He wasn't willing to take the chance.
- c) But the Apostles of Jesus were, and found that Hundredfold Life!

Are we willing to risk all—to give up all to follow Jesus—be a Christian?

