

Lesson 1: MAKING GODLY DECISIONS

All of us have to take decisions in life. It is yesterday's decision which affects where we are today and it is today's decisions which will decide where we will be tomorrow.

Though decisions may be classified into 'major' and 'minor', all are 'important' before God. Every decision has consequences and every decision will have to be accounted for in eternity!

Following the Scriptural guidelines given below will help us in making wise, godly decisions:

1. Consider all the facts (Luke 14:28-33; Acts 9:26-27; Acts 15)

Before taking a decision, we should think thoroughly about the issue at hand. Jesus told people to 'count the cost' before choosing to follow Him. Barnabas encouraged the believers at Jerusalem to first 'hear the full story of what happened to Paul' before refusing to accept him as a disciple of Christ. The council at Jerusalem heard all the facts and considered all the details relating to the new Gentile believers before taking a final decision in their regard.

We should never be hasty in taking decisions (Proverbs 19:2; 21:5; 29:20; James 1:19-20). There is a tragic example in the Old Testament of a man who was forced to sacrifice his daughter because of a vow he had taken in haste before God (Judges 11:29-40).

2. Certify with Scripture (Psalm 119:105, 133; 2 Timothy 3:16-17)

We need to search the Scriptures and find out what it has to say about the issue at hand and the decision we need to take. God's Word helps us to know 'what is right' (teaches), 'what is not right' (rebukes), 'how to get right' (corrects), and 'how to stay right' (trains in righteousness).

While the Bible does not specifically deal with every issue we face today (like "watching movies", "listening to secular music", "smoking", etc.), there are incidents, illustrations, warnings, commands, and principles in the Scriptures based on which we can understand what decision we are to take in any area of life.

Some of the Scriptural truths we need to consider before we take any decision are given below:

- Principle: Every thing we do should bring glory to God (1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17).

Question: "Will this decision bring glory or shame to the name of God?"

- Principle: Walk as Jesus did (1 John 2:6).

Question: "Would Jesus do what I am going to do? Can I involve or partner with Jesus in this activity?"

- Principle: Deny yourself (Luke 9:23).
Question: “Will this decision please God or will it merely satisfy my lust and greed?”
- Principle: Set an example (1 Timothy 4:12).
Question: “Will I be a good example through this? Would I be ashamed if others come to know that I have done this? How will this affect my testimony/witness?”
- Principle: God examines the heart (1 Samuel 16:7; Proverbs 16:2).
Question: “Are my motives right and sincere before God?”
- Principle: What you sow, you will reap (Galatians 6:7-8).
Question: “Am I ready to accept the consequences of this decision?”
- Principle: Maintain a clear conscience before God and man (Acts 24:16).
Question: “Will this decision make me more godly or guilty?”
- Principle: Trust in God (John 14:1).
Question: “Am I taking this decision in trust or fear?”
- Principle: Seek the good of others (Philippians 2:4)
Question: “Will this work out in the best interest of others?”
Note: We need to note here that some decisions we plan to take with regard to other people may be good but painful. Nonetheless, we should still take such tough decisions if it will work out in their best interest.
- Principle: We have to give an account before God on the day of Christ (Romans 14:12)
Question: “Will this decision be regretted later on in eternity?”
- Principle: We are called to be faithful stewards of what has been entrusted to us (Luke 16:10-12; 1 Peter 4:10)
Question: “Will this decision enable me to make the best use of my God-given resources or will it cause me to waste what I have been entrusted?”

3. **Concentrate on your God-given gifts** (Mark 1:35-39; Luke 19:10; Romans 12:6; 1 Peter 4:10)

The Lord Jesus clearly knew why He had come to earth and He focussed His energy on completing that assignment which the Father had entrusted Him with. He didn't waste His time getting involved in other unnecessary matters. He used the anointing upon Him for the purpose for which it was given (Luke 4:18-19; Acts 10:38).

God has created each one of us uniquely. Each one of us, as believers, have been given natural abilities as well as spiritual gifts. We should identify what they are and use them. Rather than trying to compare ourselves with others and strive to become like others, we should focus our energy on what God has given us and fulfil God's specific purpose for our lives.

Now, in the Bible, we do come across several occasions where people stepped out to do something far beyond their ability. But we must realize that they did not step out into such an endeavour on their own; only after having been commanded by God. It was God who assigned them with such a task and because He 'appointed' them, He also 'anointed' them to fulfil that responsibility. E.g. Moses, Gideon. So we should not misinterpret Scripture and take decisions we know we cannot handle believing that God will help us with it.

Such verses as "My grace is sufficient for you" (2 Corinthians 12:9) and "I can do all things through Christ who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13) are not directives to take any decision we want. The first verse relates to God's promise to preserve us in the trials that we face in life; and the second refers to the Lord's promise to equip us to effectively handle whatever comes our way or to do whatever 'He' wants us to do, and not whatever 'we' desire to do.

If we devote our time and direct our resources to those areas where we are not called by God, we will struggle and end up feeling dissatisfied. On the other hand, we will always be more fruitful and bring more glory to God when we take decisions based on 'the desire we have deep down in our hearts', 'the burden God has given us', or 'what our heart awakens to or is stirred up by'.

When we choose positions of responsibility, careers, and jobs, we should make sure that we are investing our time, energy, and money into areas of God-given strengths and gifts.

4. **Consult with people** (Proverbs 15:22; 20:18; 24:5-6; Acts 6:5)

Before taking major decisions, it is always wise and helpful to discuss with other people who are adept at the Scriptures and have practical experience as well. We should consult with those who have gone through similar experiences that we are facing. We can gather all necessary information related to our subject through books and other media.

While we should pay special heed to the counsel of godly people or other believers, this does not mean that we cannot seek the advice of unbelievers. There is nothing wrong in hearing a person's counsel just because he is an unbeliever. Infact many of the decisions we need to take like having a surgery, buying a particular product, making a specific investment, and other similar decisions may require us to get information from unbelievers. So we can always listen to what is said although we should not be controlled by what they say or follow their advice blindly.

Listening to sound advice and being open for correction will keep us from ruining ourselves and others related to us. The nation of Israel became a divided kingdom because one young ruler failed to pay any attention to the wise counsel of certain old men (1Kings 12:1-17).

5. **Check your circumstances** (Psalm 31:15; 37:18, 23; Isaiah 48:17; 49:16)

Our steps are ordered by the Lord and our paths are arranged by Him. Nonetheless, circumstances are only meant to function as a tool of confirmation for the decision we are to take; they should never control our decisions.

We should not be blindly governed by our circumstances because there may be times in life when both ‘doors of opportunity’ and ‘doors of opposition’ are sent by God. To, therefore, interpret every ‘open door’ as an opportunity from God, and every ‘closed door’ as a sign of His opposition is foolish. E.g. Paul did not jump at every open door, and neither did he try to avoid every opposition. Sometimes he made use of the open door, and at other times, he chose to skip it (1 Corinthians 16:8-9; 2 Corinthians 2:12-13). Sometimes he fled trouble, and sometimes he deliberately entered into it (Acts 9:23-25; 21:12-14).

In taking decisions based on our circumstances, we should check what is the wisest thing to do in each particular situation and ask ourselves whether- “this is the right time to take this decision” (Ecclesiastes 3:1; John 4:31), “we are equipped or able to handle this open door available before us”, “we have the ability to make the best use of this opportunity”, “this fits with the priority we have at this point of time” (1 Corinthians 16:7, 9; 2 Corinthians 2:12-13), and “this confirms with what God has been speaking to us or how God has been leading us”.

Lesson 2: HANDLING EARTHLY POSSESSIONS

The realm of worldly wealth is the most basic issue in life. If we do not know how to handle or relate to it, we fail in life as a whole (Luke 16:10-11). Jesus spoke more on this particular subject than on any other single topic. He spoke more on it than even on Heaven and Hell put together.

Our spiritual condition is reflected in our attitudes and actions regarding money and possessions. Eg. John the Baptist and his fruit of repentance (Luke 3:7-14); The reality of Zacchaeus' salvation was seen in his cheerful eagerness to part with his money (Luke 19:8-10); Money was the rich young ruler's god (Matthew 19:16-30); The outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the believers of the early Church resulted in the 'giving up' and 'sharing' of their possessions (Acts 2:44-45; 4:32-35; 19:18-20).

The Aspect of Having

Two equally incorrect beliefs about earthly possessions are that it is 'always evil', or that it is 'always good'. Two extreme philosophies and lifestyles stem from these two incorrect beliefs: Asceticism and Materialism.

Asceticism: It is a way of thinking that sees money and things as evil. It sees the spiritual world as good and the physical world as evil. The ascetic, therefore, avoids all physical pleasures and conveniences. But the Scriptures clearly point out that the God who created this world desires that we enjoy what He has made (Genesis 1; 1 Timothy 4:3-5; 6:17).

Materialism: It is a lifestyle which is preoccupied with material things or what the world has to offer. Materialism is 'money-centred' and 'thing-centred' rather than 'God-centred'. Materialism is a lie that Satan whispers in our ears: "If you only had this object or this person, you'd finally be happy". It is a life where joy, peace, and satisfaction is sought after in material things.

Our challenge is to consider 'giving up enough' of our things to detach ourselves from the things we have, yet 'holding onto enough' to use for our good and the good of others. It is to be able to 'use money without serving it'. It is to 'live in a materialistic culture without being tainted by materialism'.

When we see passages where Jesus calls on people to 'sell your possessions' (Matthew 19:21; Luke 12:33-34), we tend to make two errors in interpreting them:

One error is to interpret them to mean that "Christ always calls all His disciples to sell all their possessions, give all to the poor, and go out as missionaries of faith, supported by the rest of the Christian community". If we were all to do this, there would be no "rest of the Christian community" as

we would all own nothing, have no place to stay, no way to travel, and no means of support.

The second error is to conclude that “God never calls any of His disciples to sell all and give to the poor”.

Basically, as we look at Jesus’ teachings and the practice of the early Christians, we understand that all disciples are to have the same ‘perspective’ concerning money and possessions, but there are two kinds of disciples when it comes to the matter of ‘private ownership’. In other words, some disciples are called to ‘give away’ possessions for Kingdom causes, while others are asked to ‘utilize’ them for the sake of the Kingdom; some ‘give up’ their jobs and possessions to further the cause in ministry, while others ‘earn’ an income to generously support the same cause.

Ultimately it is the Lord who decides what kind of a lifestyle we should adopt! But in any case, no true disciple can hoard material resources or use Kingdom assets self-indulgently. No disciple can do what he or she feels like with money and possessions, failing to use them for the Kingdom.

More than leading a ‘simple’ life, we are called to lead a ‘strategic’ life. Simple living can become an end in itself. Simple living is self-centred but strategic living is Kingdom-centred. For example, a ‘simple-minded’ individual might reject a computer because it’s modern and nonessential. But a ‘strategic-minded’ person may see the computer as a tool for Kingdom purposes and thereby actually purchase one so that he can bear more fruit for the Kingdom.

How much money and possessions can we therefore safely keep?

Those who ‘want’ to get rich set themselves up for spiritual disaster (1 Timothy 6:9-10). Those who ‘happen’ to be rich, simply as a result of circumstances, hard work or wisdom have done nothing wrong. Really, the issue is not how much a man makes. Big industry and big salaries are a fact of our times, and they are not necessarily evil. The evil is in being deceived into thinking that a five-figure salary should be accompanied by a five-figure lifestyle.

It is alright to have fun possessions such as a bicycle and badminton racket. They aren’t necessary but they contribute to one’s physical and mental health. It’s alright to go on vacations; they may not be necessary yet they bring renewal and precious relationship-building opportunities.

→ We may therefore say that we can have enough to care for our basic needs and some wants, but not so much that we are distracted from our central purpose or that large amounts are kept from Kingdom causes (Matthew 6:26-29). Not so much that we become proud and independent of the Lord (Deuteronomy 8:13-14). Our worldly wealth should never reach a point where it hinders our relationship with God and fails to act as a means of blessing unto others.

The Aspect of Giving

Giving involves money, but much more. We can give a meal, house, dress, bicycle, sewing machine, or any possession. We can use our vehicle to give people a ride or to go buy groceries for a shut-in.

Guidelines for Giving

➤ *Give Excellently (2 Corinthians 8:7).*

We are called to excel in giving. This means that:

a) *We should not give to God what is illegal or unrighteous.*

What we earn should be by godly means or without compromising on Biblical values (Deuteronomy 23:18; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 3:17). Also, we are not to keep what belongs to the Government especially in matters of paying tax (Matthew 22:21).

b) *What we give should be the best we have to offer to God (Malachi 1:6-8).*

We should never give away something we didn't want in the first place. Such giving is merely 'selective disposal'. It's often done because we want to create space in our own homes or even to buy a newer or better version of the product we have 'given'.

c) *We should continually progress in our level of giving as God blesses us financially or as we learn to trust Him more.*

A disciple does not ask, "How much can I keep?" but "How much more can I give?" Whenever we start to get comfortable with our level of giving, it's time to raise it again.

➤ *Give Quietly (Matthew 6:1-4).*

Giving should always be out of pure motives. It should be done out of a heart that sincerely loves God and His people, and not to serve any selfish interest. It is never to be for the purpose of calling attention to ourselves or an attempt to impress other people. Our giving should never be for the purpose of gaining respect, popularity or power with people. Rather, it is to be such a natural and instinctive part of our life that we don't even consider it as some great work (Matthew 25:37-39).

➤ *Give Wisely (Matthew 25:27).*

We should know where to give our money and possessions.

➤ Give to the needs of the local church. Giving should start with one's local Bible-believing, Christ-centred church, the spiritual community where one is fed and to which one is accountable (1 Corinthians 9:3-12; Galatians 6:6; 1 Timothy 5:17-18).

➤ Give to the cause of the Great Commission (1 Corinthians 9:14; Philippians 1:4-5; 3 John 7-8). The spread of the Gospel is what is on the heart of God and should dominate our giving as well.

➤ Give to the deserving poor (Galatians 2:10; James 1:27; 2:14-16; 1 John 3:16-19). Our first priority is to care for the needs of those of "the household of faith" (Galatians 6:10). But we are to also show mercy to needy people in the world as well. In the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus asks us to

show love and mercy to every one in need (Luke 10:37). Jesus had a regular practice of giving to the poor (John 13:29).

- Give to those who sow spiritual seed into your life (1 Corinthians 9:11).

We should not give to churches or individuals who compromise on Biblical values and teachings, who do not have financial accountability, and who use money for their own self-interest.

- *Give Cheerfully (2 Corinthians 9:7).*

People of God are to always give from their heart- with gladness, not reluctantly or under compulsion (2 Chronicles 24:10).

- *Give Proportionately (Acts 11:29; 1 Corinthians 16:2).*

Under the Old Covenant, there were two main types of offerings: the first was the 'Tithe' and the second was the 'Freewill Offerings'.

Tithe→ It means 'a tenth part/one-tenth/10%'. The tithe belonged to the Lord, applied to everything, and was to be set apart entirely for God's purposes (Leviticus 27:30). The main reason the tithe was instituted was to teach people "to put God first in their lives" (Deuteronomy 14:23b). The tithe was to be offered from the first and best portion of every provision they received from the Lord. So it is described as an offering of 'Firstfruits' (Exodus 23:14-19; Proverbs 3:9).

Freewill offering→ These were voluntary contributions beyond the tithe or firstfruits (Exodus 35:29; Numbers 15:3; Deuteronomy 12:6, 17). They constituted 'true giving' because the 'tithe' was a debt repaid to God, not a gift as such. During the building of the Tabernacle in the desert and the rebuilding of the Temple in Jerusalem, people gladly offered freewill offerings (Exodus 36:4-7; Ezra 1:4, 6; 7:16; 8:28).

Under the New Covenant, we are called to give in proportion to our income or according to how God has prospered us. This means that every individual believer is to decide how much he will give and how much he will keep for himself. What we need to always remember in such cases is that:

- a) *Our level of giving is to be greater than Old Testament believers.*

Our level of giving is to definitely 'exceed' that of the Pharisees who were regular tithers (Matthew 23:23; Luke 18:11-12). We can never give less than 10 percent or only 10 percent to God; our giving is to supersede that of the Israelites. We have experienced God's abundant grace and are under a 'better' covenant; we can never then give 'only or less than' what people who were under the Old Covenant gave!

- b) *God is not concerned about how much we give, but how much we could have given and how much we have left after we have made the gift (Mark 12:43-44).*

Large amounts of offering do not directly indicate a generous heart because it is possible that the

giver may still have vast resources remaining in his possession. This is why the lesser we have left, the more we have actually given!

➤ *Give Sacrificially (2 Corinthians 8:2-3).*

There are three levels of giving- less than our ability, according to our ability, and beyond our ability. Most Christians stay within the first two categories.

To give beyond our ability is to give even our circumstances say we shouldn't. It is to give away not just the luxuries, but also some of the necessities. It means living with the faith of the poor widow. Sacrificial giving is parting with what we'd rather keep. It's keeping the old and giving away the new or giving away both.

Sacrificial giving may appear to be unreasonable. But in reality, it's the perfectly reasonable thing to do because it brings God glory, meets other's needs, and ensures us eternal rewards.

➤ *Give Regularly (1 Corinthians 16:2).*

Systematic giving is central to biblical giving. To be systematic, we should learn to give according to how we receive from God. If we are paid weekly, we should give weekly. If we are paid monthly, we should give monthly.

The Israelites made the mistake of postponing their giving to rebuild the ruined Temple. God rebuked them for it and even withheld blessings from His people as a result (Haggai 1:1-11). Postponed giving is postponed obedience and postponed obedience is disobedience!

People who don't give systematically rarely give substantially. They may give a few hundred or a few thousand rupees a couple of times a year and think of themselves as big givers based on those few acts. Such people can invariably overestimate how much they give.

Lesson 3: DEVELOPING CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER

God's ultimate goal for the believer is to become like Christ (Romans 8:29; 1 John 2:6). Becoming like Christ does not mean losing one's personality; it concerns the transformation of one's character whereby we reflect and reveal Him in our daily lives (Matthew 5:48; Ephesians 4:17 & 5:1-2; Titus 2:12-14).

The kind of character God wants us to develop is described in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7), the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23), Paul's great chapter on love (1 Corinthians 13), and Peter's list of the characteristics of an effective and productive life (2 Peter 1:5-8).

We cannot reproduce the character of Jesus in our own strength. It is God who works within us to produce Christlikeness and our responsibility is to cooperate with Him in what He is doing in our lives (Philippians 2:12 & 13- the "work in" mentioned in this verse is God's part and the "work out" is our responsibility).

The role we play may be compared to that of a patient who submits himself to the treatment of a doctor. A patient does not try to change himself and neither does he simply hope for his condition to get better; rather, he listens to the counsel of the doctor and faithfully follows his instructions with regard to intake of medicine or change in food habits.

1. Means of Transformation: The Word of God. Our duty: Abide in the Word! (John 8:31-32; Acts 20:32; 2 Timothy 3:16-17; James 1:21-25)

Change begins in the mind. Repentance is, first of all, a 'change of mind'. Our thoughts decide what we eventually become. The way we think determines the way we feel and the way we feel influences the way we act. This is why it is vital that our minds be renewed if we wish to make any kind of progress in our walk with God.

The Greek word for transformed, 'metamorphosis' (used in Romans 12:2 and 2 Corinthians 3:18), is used today to describe the amazing change a caterpillar goes through in becoming a butterfly. It is a beautiful picture of what happens to us spiritually when we allow God to direct our thoughts.

There are strongholds present in our mind- strongholds of wrong beliefs and values (2 Corinthians 10:5). Spiritual growth is the process of replacing lies with truth. The only way to remove or break these strongholds down is by saturating our hearts and minds with God's Word. There are five helpful ways to do this: receive, read, research, remember and reflect on it.

Receive: Listen and accept it with an open, receptive attitude (Mark 4:24-25; Luke 8:18).

Read: Daily Bible reading through following a regular Bible reading plan.

Research: Ask questions like who? what? when? where? why? and how? and write down insights.

Remember: Select verses which have specifically spoken to you (like prayers, declarations, praises, promises, commands) and write them down on a small card which you can carry with you. Review them aloud through the day.

Reflect: Keep thinking about what God teaches you daily through the Bible.

The truths of the Scriptures that we feed on and focus upon will transform our attitudes and ultimately our actions. We will see a deep and lasting change in our behaviour or lifestyle when the Word of God governs and directs our thinking.

2. Means of Transformation: The Spirit of God. Our duty: Walk in step with the Spirit!

(Romans 8:2; 2 Corinthians 3:18; Galatians 5:16; Ephesians 5:18; 1 Thessalonians 4:7-8)

We cannot become like Christ without the Holy Spirit. He is known as 'Holy' Spirit because His primary duty is to make us holy. One way that the Spirit purifies and sanctifies us is by birthing good, godly desires within us (Romans 8:5; Philippians 2:13). As we set our minds on these desires and keep fulfilling them, we will witness the fruit of the Spirit being cultivated and formed within us.

When we live in the Spirit, we will not fulfil the desires of the flesh. The two are contrary to each other; we cannot do both at the same time. The best way, therefore, to live as an overcomer is by continually walking in step with the Spirit as this will give no room or opportunity for the flesh to manifest or exert itself (Galatians 5:17-23).

The word 'walk' is used in two different ways, using two different Greek words. The first 'walk' is 'walking by oneself' (Galatians 5:16). The second 'walk' means 'march in the Spirit, in step with others' (Galatians 5:25). Both kinds of walking are vital in our journey with God and form in us the character of Christ (Galatians 5:22-23).

3. Means of Transformation: The Difficulties of Life. Our duty: Endure hardship!

(Deuteronomy 8:2-3; Hebrews 12:7-11; James 1:2-4)

Adversities, difficulties or hardships are a key tool that God uses to discipline us and help us share in His holiness. Rather than getting frustrated at the jerks and jolts of everyday life, we must learn to enjoy the journey and face each trial with a smile. Our basis of rejoicing, ofcourse, is not the problem itself but in what we know will be accomplished as a result of the issue or crisis that has come up!

We should look to the Lord both to give us grace to face and overcome each difficult situation as well as maintain our joy during the whole process. We must not grumble during our crises but we must see such moments and experiences as part of God's moulding process whereby our self can be broken and Christ can be fully formed in our lives.

Spiritual maturity is neither automatic nor instant; it is a gradual, progressive development that will take the rest of our lives.

We must want to grow, decide to grow, make an effort to grow, and persist in growing. Again, this process will only be finished when we get to Heaven or when Jesus returns. At that point, whatever unfinished work on our character is left will be completed. The Bible says that when we are finally able to see Jesus perfectly, we will become perfectly like Him (1 John 3:2).

Lesson 4: STIRRING UP SPIRITUAL GIFTS

The Definition of Spiritual Gifts

Spiritual gifts are “specific, supernatural abilities freely and sovereignly given by the Holy Spirit”. God gives every believer ‘spiritual gifts’ for the twin purpose of ‘edifying other believers in the Body of Christ’ (1 Corinthians 12:7; 14:4-5, 26; 1 Peter 4:10) and ‘establishing the Kingdom of God on earth’ (Mark 16:20; Acts 4:13-14, 21-22; 8:5-8; 9:36-42; Hebrews 2:3-4).

Spiritual gifts are different from ‘natural gifts’- skills or talents present from birth which are given by God to every human being. When we initially come to Christ, we come complete with our natural aptitudes and abilities and we give them to Him. While these can be used in His service, we must also realise that they are insufficient to accomplish the work of God and serve the purpose of God for our lives.

We must also distinguish ‘Gifts of the Spirit’ from the ‘Fruit of the Spirit’. It is not the presence of spiritual gifts but the presence of the fruit of the Spirit in a person which reveals his maturity. Gifts are instant in operation; Fruit takes time to develop. Gifts reveal the nature of God; Fruit reveals the character of the individual. Gifts are distributed among different individuals; Fruit should be wholly present in the same individual. Gifts are temporary; Fruit is eternal.

The Diversity of Spiritual Gifts

There are several places in the New Testament where gift-lists are presented (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Corinthians 12:8-10; Ephesians 4:11; 1 Peter 4:9-11). But these lists, whether separately or combined, do not provide a complete category of the gifts because neither Paul nor Peter were attempting to construct exhaustive or detailed lists of gifts when they specified the ones they did. They were simply giving us examples of various gifts that are available to us by the Holy Spirit: Prophecy/Prophet, Serving, Teaching/Teacher, Encouraging, Giving, Leadership/Administration, Kindness/Showing mercy/Helps, Message of Wisdom, Message of Knowledge, Faith, Gifts of Healing, Miraculous powers, Discernment/Distinguishing between spirits, Different kinds of Tongues/Languages, Interpretation of Tongues/Languages, Apostle, Evangelist, Pastor, Hospitality.

There are also some other abilities which are gifts from God, although not specifically mentioned as such: Intercession (Romans 9:1-3; 10:1), Celibacy (1 Corinthians 7:7), Musical Gift (2 Samuel 23:1-2; Ephesians 5:18-20), Artistic workmanship (Exodus 31:1-5; 35:30-35), Writing (2 Peter 1:20-21).

No single gift is given to everyone. And no individual receives all the gifts. God planned it this way so we would need each other and learn to depend on one another. When we use our gifts together,

everyone benefits and God is glorified.

If we forget these basic truths about spiritual gifts, it always causes trouble in the church. Two common problems are “gift-envy” and “gift-projection”. The first occurs when we compare our gifts with others, feel dissatisfied with what God has given us, and become jealous of how God uses others. The second problem happens when we expect everyone else to share our interests, do what we are called to do, and feel as passionate about it as we do.

The Discovery of Spiritual Gifts

The Bible doesn't deal specifically with finding gifts. The apostles Paul and Peter seem to assume that believers already know what gifts they possess (Romans 12:6-8; 1 Peter 4:10). We may, however, follow certain guidelines to understand which spiritual gifts we have been given:

- Assess your gifts and abilities- *Take a long, honest look at what you are good at and what you are not good at (Romans 12:3). Make a list. Ask other people for their candid opinion. .*
- Ask questions like these- *Where have I seen fruit in my life that other people have confirmed? What do I enjoy doing most? When do I feel the most fully alive? What am I doing when I lose track of time?*
- Experiment with different areas of service- *Start serving or experimenting with different ministries. Finding out needs and opportunities that exist in the church will help in this regard.*
- Examine your experiences- *Review your life. Our experiences are indicators of where and how God wants us to serve (2 Corinthians 1:4).*

Lack of a particular spiritual gift does not mean that we can ignore certain responsibilities as Christians. While the presence of a gift will cause us to experience a special effectiveness and joy in ministering in those areas, the fact that we do not have certain gifts should not cause us to stop or avoid functioning in other areas. For example, we are all called to give or share our possessions whether we all have the ‘gift of giving’ or not; we are all called to share the Gospel even though we may not all have the ‘gift of evangelism’; we are all called to pray for the sick even though we may not all have the ‘gifts of healing’, and so on.

The Developing of Spiritual Gifts

We are to make the most of the gifts which we have been given (Matthew 25:28; 2 Timothy 1:6). Gifts regularly used become ministries. For instance, teaching regularly used produces teachers, prophecy developed and employed produces prophets.

The manifestations (open, visible demonstration) of the Spirit mentioned in the 14th chapter of First Corinthians are in the context of a church service. Paul mentions various possible forms of contribution

that can be made by the Spirit-filled believers who participate: a psalm/hymn (some form of musical contribution), a word of instruction/teaching (impartation of some truth from God's Word), a revelation (prophecy), a tongue and its interpretation.

We must ensure that we have right motives while operating in gifts. The example of Simon the Magician who sought after spiritual gifts for his own fame and popularity teaches us that we must be careful about our inner motives (Acts 8:19). We should minister out of a genuine desire to glorify God and a sincere love for others.

Spiritual gifts are normally permanently possessed. (*Romans 12:6- It talks about 'having' gifts; 1 Corinthians 12:12-26- Paul compares believers to organs of a human body which have specific roles; 1 Timothy 4:14- Paul reminds Timothy of a specific gift which is within him as a deposit.*) However, the neglect and misuse of the gift or the grieving of the Spirit can cause the anointing over a person to operate in a gift to slowly diminish and ultimately disappear. (*1 Corinthians 12:11- The Spirit 'gives' to each one. This word indicates a 'continual activity', not one that takes place only at a time in the past.*)

Lesson 5: FULFILLING THE MINISTRY OF RECONCILIATION

THE COMMISSION

Every believer has been given a wonderful assignment and tremendous privilege by God. It is described as the ‘ministry of reconciliation’ (2 Corinthians 5:18).

The word ‘reconciliation’ implies that there is a war or enmity of some kind. Man was not only created ‘by’ God; he was also created ‘for’ God (Isaiah 43:7; Romans 11:36; Colossians 1:16). Whereas God was to be the supreme purpose for our existence and the object of our love- the very center of our lives, we have failed to acknowledge Him in this way and we live according to our own desires (Exodus 20:2-3; Matthew 22:37).

Such living for self, which is the essence of sin, has resulted in separation from God and necessitates punishment. The sinner must die for his rebellion. But because of His mercy, the just demands of God’s law, to which all men are accountable, have been fulfilled through the life and death of Christ.

As a result man can now be restored to a right relationship with God. Anyone who repents of his sins and puts his faith in Jesus Christ can receive forgiveness and become a child of God. He can receive a new life with a new nature, a new inheritance, and a new destiny.

It is this message of reconciliation which we are called to share with everyone around us- that God is not counting our sins against us but is offering us a way out from our wickedness and all its related consequences. This is described in the Bible as “Good News” (Luke 2:9-11; 24:46-47; John 3:14-17; Acts 3:26; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

THE COMPULSION

Our mission is extremely significant such that Jesus repeated it five times, in five different ways, in five different books of the Bible (Matthew 28:19-20; Mark 16:15; Luke 24:47; John 20:21; Acts 1:8). Carrying out this ministry is not optional; it is mandatory. Infact God holds us responsible for the unbelievers who live around us (Ezekiel 3:18; Acts 20:25-27). As long as we know one person who doesn’t know Christ, we must keep praying for them and reaching out to them.

The work we are involved in has eternal significance. It will impact and completely transform the destiny of other people. This is why we must carry a sense of responsibility and urgency. While we will have all of eternity to celebrate with those we have brought to Christ, we only have a short lifetime in which to reach them!

Completing the task of preaching the Gospel is vital to the return of the Lord Jesus Christ. Jesus cannot return until people from every tribe and tongue has had the opportunity to hear the Good News (Matthew 24:14; Revelation 7:9-10).

THE COMMUNICATION

There are various ways in which we can reach out to the unbelievers around us-

- **Words:** Minister through a direct presentation of the Gospel (Mark 1:14-15, 38-39; Acts 8:4-5; 14:21); praying for those in need (Matthew 19:13-15); giving a word of encouragement (Luke 8:50; 18:40-41; 19:5) or sharing a personal testimony regarding the encounter we have had with Christ and the transformation He has brought about in our lives (Luke 8:39; John 4:39-41).
- **Works:** The Lord Jesus exhorted us to let our light shine before men so that they can see our good works and glorify our Father in Heaven (Matthew 5:13). This is exactly what Peter also writes about in his letter to believers (1 Peter 2:12). In a world where everyone is self-seeking, our sincere love for those in the church and community will truly touch and transform society.
- **Ways:** We can impact others by living differently (Luke 6:27-36). When we live in a manner contrary to the system of this world, people around us will take note and watch us carefully. Righteousness and integrity should govern our lives. The way we run around the daily chores of life; the way we relate to other people, especially our enemies; the way we respond to trials and temptations, challenges and crises should all be in line with the truths of the Word!
- **Worship:** This basically speaks of the way we relate to God. There is no other faith like the Christian faith which allows man to have such a simple, intimate relationship with God. By leading lives of faith and total dependence upon the Lord thus practically demonstrating to the world what it really means to walk with Jesus and be filled with the Spirit. Even our meetings should be so saturated with the presence of God that it causes the unbeliever to come, fall down and commit his life to God (1 Corinthians 14:24-25).
- **Wonders:** God confirms His Word through His Spirit (Hebrews 2:3b, 4). Evangelism involves a 'declaration' of the Word of God and a 'demonstration' of the Power of God (Romans 15:18-19). We are called to 'defend' and 'confirm' the Gospel (Philippians 1:7). Wisdom and wonders are equally vital ingredients in ministry (Acts 6:8, 10). The Book of Acts is full of examples showing how God's Spirit worked through the apostles by signs and wonders in order to prove that Jesus Christ is Lord (Eg. Acts 2:43; 3:1-16; 5:14-16; 6:8; 8:5-8; 9:32-42).

Lesson 6: EXPERIENCING INTIMACY WITH GOD

THE POSSIBILITY

Our relationship to God has many different aspects: God is our Creator and Maker, Redeemer and Saviour, Lord and Master. But there is a unique way in which God relates to us- this is as Father and Friend.

God longs to be intimate with each one of us. In Eden, we see God's ideal relationship with mankind: Adam and Eve enjoyed a deep, personal relationship with God. There were no rituals, ceremonies, or religion- just a simple loving relationship between God and the people He created. Unhindered by guilt or fear, Adam and Eve delighted in God, and He delighted in them.

We were made to live in God's continual presence, but after the Fall, that ideal relationship was lost. Only a few people in Old Testament times had the privilege of friendship with God. Abraham and Moses were called 'friends of God', David was called 'a man after God's own heart', and Job, Enoch, and Noah had intimate relationships with God.

But Jesus changed the situation. When He paid for our sins on the Cross, the veil in the temple that symbolized our separation from God was split in two from top to bottom, indicating that direct access to God was once again available. An intimate relationship with God is now possible because of the grace of God and the sacrifice of Jesus.

THE PROCESS

We can understand how intimacy with God can be experienced by studying the lives of those who walked closely with God in Bible times.

1. Through Compelling Desire

Intimate friendship with God is a choice, not an accident. We must intentionally seek it. We must desire friendship with God more than anything else. It must be so important that we are ready to give up other things. (Psalm 42:1; 63:1; 145:18; Jeremiah 29:13; Matthew 5:6; Luke 1:53; Hebrews 11:6b)

David passionately desired to know God above all else: he used words like longing, yearning, thirsting, hungering. He craved for God. Jacob's passion to know God and receive His blessing was so intense that he wrestled all night with God. The amazing part of that story is that God, who is all powerful, let Jacob win! God isn't offended when we 'wrestle' with Him, because wrestling is a personal and passionate activity. Paul was another man who was passionate to know the Lord Jesus Christ. Nothing else mattered; it was the first priority, total focus and ultimate goal of his life.

2. Through Complete Honesty

We must be honest with God about our faults and feelings. God doesn't expect us to be perfect, but He does insist on complete honesty- transparency and truthfulness. Genuine friendship is built on disclosure. In the Bible, the friends of God were honest about their feelings, often complaining, accusing and arguing with their Creator. God wasn't grieved or angered by this frankness; in fact, He encouraged it. What might have appeared to others as 'audacity' God viewed as 'authenticity'.

God allowed Abraham to question and challenge Him over the destruction of the city of Sodom (Genesis 18). Abraham kept pestering God over what it would take to spare the city, negotiating God down from fifty righteous people to only ten. Moses was once troubled and frustrated at the grumbling and complaining of the Israelites. He vented it on the Lord, who listened to him and gave him a solution (Numbers 11:4-17). God also listened patiently to David's many accusations of unfairness, betrayal and abandonment. God did not kill Jeremiah when he claimed that God had deceived him (Jeremiah 20:7).

To instruct us in candid honesty, God gave us the book of Psalms- a worship manual, full of ranting, raving, doubts, fears, resentments, and deep passions combined with thanksgiving, praise and statements of faith. Every possible emotion is recorded in the Psalms. When we read the emotional confessions and declarations of David and others, we realise that this is how God wants us to come before Him and relate to Him- holding back nothing of what we feel.

3. Through Constant Conversation

We will never grow a close relationship with God by just attending a church service once a week or even having a daily quiet time. Intimacy with God is built by sharing 'all' our life experiences with Him.

While it is vital to establish the habit of a daily devotional time with God, He wants more than a daily appointment with Him in our schedule. He wants to be included in 'every' activity, conversation, problem and thought. We can carry on a continuous, open-ended conversation with Him throughout the day, talking with Him about whatever we are doing or thinking at that moment. 'Praying without ceasing' means conversing with God while shopping, driving, working, or performing any other everyday task. We can also 'pray all the time' by using 'one-line prayers' like "O God You are my God, earnestly I seek You", "I need Your grace", "I want to know You", "Work in me what is pleasing to You", or making 'one-line declarations' like "For me, to live is Christ", "You will never leave me nor forsake me", "God is my refuge and my strength".

Everything we do can be 'spending time with God' if He is invited to be a part of it and we stay aware of His presence. The key is not changing 'what we do', but changing 'our attitude' towards what we do. Because God is with us all the time, it is possible to be close to Him at any time and in any place.

Practising the presence of God all the time is a skill, a habit we can develop. We must train our minds to remember God constantly. At first, we may need to create reminders to regularly bring our thoughts back to the awareness that God is with us in that moment. Visual reminders (written notes) or audible reminders (hourly alarm) are helpful.

4. Through Continual Meditation

Think about God's Word throughout the day (Psalm 1:2). While we cannot spend all day studying the Bible, we can think about it throughout the day, recalling verses we have read or memorised and mulling them over in our mind. This practice is called meditation.

Meditation is often misunderstood as some difficult, mysterious ritual practised by isolated monks and mystics. But meditation is simply 'focussed thinking'. The Bible repeatedly urges us to meditate on who God is, what He has done, and what He has said.

The reason God considered Job and David His close friends was that they valued His Word above everything else, and they thought about it continually throughout the day (Job 23:12; Psalm 119:97; 77:12). When we read our Bible or hear a sermon, we must not simply forget it and walk away. We must develop the practice of reviewing the truth in our minds, thinking about it over and over. The more time we spend reviewing what God has said, the more we will understand what God is trying to communicate to us and the secrets of His heart.

5. Through Careful Obedience

Obedience is a condition for intimacy with God (John 14:21, 23). And every time we trust God's wisdom and do whatever He says, even when we don't understand it, we deepen our relationship with God.

While we can be friends with God, we must remember that we are not His equals. He is our loving leader and we follow Him. We obey God, not out of duty or compulsion, but because we love Him and trust that He knows what is best for us. We want to follow Christ out of gratitude for all He has done for us, and the closer we follow Him, the greater our joy and the deeper our friendship becomes (Romans 12:1-2; John 15:9-11).

God treasures simple acts of obedience more than our prayers, praise, or offerings (1 Samuel 15:22). When Jesus asks us to love others, help the needy, share our resources, keep our lives clean, offer forgiveness, show mercy, and bring others to Him, love motivates us to obey immediately and brings a smile to God's face.

Lesson 7: CULTIVATING REAL FELLOWSHIP

As members of one family, God intends believers to experience life together (Acts 2:44; 4:32; Romans 12:10, 15). The Bible describes this shared experience as ‘fellowship’. Real fellowship is so much more than just showing up at services, talking with each other or having food and fun together. It includes unselfish loving, honest sharing, practical serving, sacrificial giving, sympathetic comforting and all the other “one another” commands found in the New Testament. Infact the exact word for fellowship used in the Bible (Gk. ‘koinonia’) is used of Siamese twins having the same bloodstream, or partners in a business whose financial fortunes will rise or fall together.

Real fellowship needs to be cultivated. There are choices and commitments we must make in order to produce a loving Christian community. This is why the New Testament is filled with instructions and guidelines on how to get along and relate to others in God’s family.

1. It requires transparency.

Real fellowship is not superficial, surface-level conversations. It is genuine, heart-to-heart sharing and it happens when there is a safe environment of warm acceptance and confidentiality. In such a setting people get honest about who they are and what is happening in their lives. They reveal their hurts, express their feelings, confess their failures, disclose their doubts, admit their fears, acknowledge their weaknesses, and ask for help and prayer. This kind of openness brings about healing and greater intimacy (James 5:16; 1 John 1:7)

Sometimes being honest would mean that we have to lovingly confront people with the truth rather than gloss over a problem or ignore an issue. While it is much easier to remain silent, it is not the loving thing to do because our silence could cause them to continue in self-destructive ways harming themselves and those around them in the process (1 Corinthians 5:3-12).

Many church fellowships and small groups remain superficial because they are afraid of conflict. Whenever an issue comes up that might cause tension or discomfort, it is immediately covered up in order to preserve the peace. But such unresolved issues will only do more harm than good. It will create an environment where suspicion and gossip thrive.

Being frank is not a license to say anything we want, wherever and whenever we want. It is not rudeness. There is a right time and a right way to do everything (Ecclesiastes 8:6). Thoughtless words will leave lasting wounds. God tells us to relate and speak to each other in the church as loving family members (1 Timothy 5:1-2).

2. It requires humility.

Pride builds walls between people; humility builds bridges. An arrogant spirit and a superior attitude will destroy fellowship faster than anything else. This is why the Bible tells us to clothe ourselves with humility towards one another (1 Peter 5:5b).

Humility is not ‘thinking less of yourself’ but ‘thinking of yourself less’. In other words, it is thinking more about others. God does not want us to be ‘independent’ or ‘dependent’; He wants us to be ‘interdependent’ (1 Corinthians 12:25; 2 Corinthians 8:14-15). Humility is ‘acknowledging that we need one another’ (*certainly, we grow stronger in our faith when others walk with us and encourage us*) and also ‘making ourselves available to serve others’ (*over fifty times in the New Testament, we are commanded to do different tasks to “one another” and “each other”*).

We can develop humility in very practical ways: by admitting our weaknesses (2 Corinthians 12:7-10); by being open to correction (Proverbs 13:10); by being patient with others’ failures and shortcomings (Colossians 3:12-13); and, by considering others better than ourselves, even those who are of a low position in society (Philippians 2:3; Romans 12:16).

3. It requires courtesy.

In no family are all members exactly the same. The same is true with the family of God. Courtesy is respecting our differences and being considerate towards one another (Romans 15:1; Titus 3:2).

In every church and in every small group, there is always at least one ‘difficult’ person, usually more than one. These people may have special emotional needs, deep insecurities, irritating mannerisms, or poor social skills. God puts these people in our midst for both their benefit and ours. They are an opportunity for growth and a test of fellowship: “Will we love them as brothers and sisters and treat them with dignity?”

The truth is that we all have quirks and annoying traits. But acceptance in a family isn’t based on how smart, beautiful or talented one is: it’s based on the fact that we belong to each other!

One key to courtesy is to understand where people are coming from. Discover their history or background. When we know what they have been through, we will have more understanding. Instead of thinking about how far they still have to go, we must think about how far they have come in spite of their adverse circumstances and difficult experiences.

4. It requires sympathy.

Sympathy is not giving advice or offering a quick-fix; sympathy is entering in and sharing the pain of others. It is understanding what others are going through (Hebrews 4:15).

Every time we listen to and affirm someone's feelings, we build fellowship. The problem is that we are either in a hurry to solve everybody's problems that we don't have time to sympathize with people or that we are preoccupied with our own hurts and issues.

The deepest level of fellowship is the 'fellowship of suffering', where we enter into each other's pain and grief and carry each other's burdens (Galatians 6:2). Those who do this best are those who have gone through difficult experiences themselves.

It is in the times of deep crisis, grief and doubt that we need each other the most. When circumstances crush us to the point that our faith falters, that's when we need believing friends the most. That is not a time to judge and condemn, but to show mercy.

5. It requires frequency.

We must have regular, constant contact with one another in order to build genuine fellowship. Relationships take time. We have to spend meaningful, quality time with people to build deep relationships.

The Bible encourages us to develop the habit of meeting together (Hebrews 10:25). This meeting together is not based on convenience but conviction. If we want to cultivate real fellowship, it will mean meeting together even when we don't feel like it, because we believe it is important.

Jesus used to meet with His disciples regularly (John 18:1-2). The first Christians used to get together on a daily basis (Acts 2:46; Hebrews 3:13).

Lesson 8: ENGAGING IN SPIRITUAL WARFARE

Throughout the New Testament, 'warfare' terminology is used to describe the Christian life- words such as 'strive', 'fight', 'conquer', 'overcome' (Luke 11:22; 13:24; Romans 15:30; 1 John 2:13-14; 4:4; Revelation 2:11, 26; 17:14). We have been 'rescued' from the dominion of darkness (Colossians 1:13), 'freed' from our sins (Romans 6:18; Revelation 1:5), and called to 'fight the good fight of the faith' (1 Timothy 1:18; 6:12).

The Description of Spiritual Warfare

Based on the passages of 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 and Ephesians 6:12, we understand that spiritual warfare is a battle fought by believers with demonic forces who exist in the heavenly realms.

- *Who are these demonic forces?*

Their history is given in Isaiah 14:12-14 and Ezekiel 28:11-19. Among the angels of God, there was one of great power and dignity known as Lucifer. He was clothed with wisdom, light and beauty. He held positions of leadership in the ministry of worship. He was an anointed cherub guarding the throne of God. But he rebelled against God by becoming proud and wanting to attain equality with God in status and authority. As a result, he was cast out of Heaven. As he came out, he took a number of angels with him (2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6). These angels have now become demons or evil spirits. They sinned against God and now fight against Him (Revelation 12:9). They together make up the kingdom of darkness (Mt. 12:25-26).

- *What is meant by 'heavenly realms'?*

Based on the teachings of Scripture, we understand that there are basically three heavens. The first heaven refers to the visible sky (Deuteronomy 33:28; Judges 5:4; 1 Chronicles 27:23; Psalm 8:3; 19:1; Joel 2:30) and the third heaven refers to Paradise or the very presence of God (2 Corinthians 12:1). The second heaven is between these two heavens and is the abode of spiritual forces of evil.

This warfare is known as 'spiritual warfare' because it is a battle fought against 'spirit' beings (not human beings) using 'spiritual' weapons (not man-made weapons). The goal for the believer is to defeat Satan's evil strategies and schemes (his plans of 'deception' and 'destruction') so that the rule of God may be established and the will of God may be done on earth in the lives of people.

The Duty in Spiritual Warfare

1. Know your Enemy.

We should neither 'under-estimate' nor 'over-estimate' Satan.

Don't under-estimate Satan!

- Recognize that he has authority and power.
He is described as the prince of this world (John 12:31; 14:30), ruler of the kingdom of the air (Ephesians 2:2), god of this age (2 Corinthians 4:4).
He has an undivided, highly organized kingdom (Matthew 12:26; Ephesians 6:12), has dominion (Colossians 1:13) and power (Mark 5:3; Acts 19:14-16; 1 Thessalonians 2:18; 2 Thessalonians 2:9).
- Recognize that he is cunning.
He has the ability to deceive people (Genesis 3:1; 2 Corinthians 4:4; Matthew 24:11, 24; 2 Thessalonians 2:10; 1 Timothy 4:1). He is known as the 'father of lies' (John 8:44).
- Recognize that he has experience.
He is known as the 'ancient' Serpent (Rev. 12:9).

Note:

We should not go beyond the Scriptural boundaries set for us in our approach towards Satan-

Don't bind the devil

It is seen that people who engage in mission are encouraged to identify the demonic powers controlling the proposed location and to wrestle in prayer until they are 'bound' in the name of Jesus, thus releasing the area before engaging in more practical activity. But the evidence in Scripture to support such a practice is hardly any, to say the least.

There are only two verses in the whole Bible that explicitly describe 'territorial' spirits (Daniel 9:13, 20). And what needs to be noted there is that Daniel did not directly engage them, nor was he commanded to do so. They were dealt with by angelic intervention.

One striking feature of engagement with demons by Jesus and others in the New Testament is that they never took the initiative. They never went looking for them. Only when demons manifested themselves were they confronted and cast out and even then not always immediately, as if their interference was a distraction (Acts 16:18).

There is certainly no trace of starting missions in any new place by binding the local demonic ruler, no hint that Paul sought to identify and bind the spirits of Athens or Corinth before preaching there. So there is no apostolic precedent, either in teaching or practice. Neither is there any command for believers to 'bind' the devil.

God has allowed Satan to be kept loose for now. At the end of time, an angel will come and bind Satan for a thousand years (Revelation 20:2).

What about Jesus talking of 'binding the strong man'? (Matthew 12:29)

The whole passage there is a response to the accusation of the Pharisees that He was an agent of Satan and casting out demons by the help of Satan. He was telling them that this was impossible and giving them several reasons why they were wrong.

First He told them, "If Satan helped me to cast out his own demons, his kingdom would never stand." Then He said, "Your charge against me is self-defeating because you are all also involved in the ministry of exorcism. If I drive out demons by Satan's help, how then do your people drive them out? Are you admitting that they also do it the same way?" And then, His final assertion, "It would be impossible for a person to enter a strong man's house and plunder his possessions unless he first overcame and bound the strong man. This being so, My seizing people from the possession of Satan (the strong man) and setting them free proves that he and I are not working together."

So all that Jesus was giving here was an illustration to prove that He was not in league with Satan; He was not teaching that we must go and bind the devil before we can set people free,

Don't banish the devil

We cannot order the devil to go to hell. For one, he is not in hell now. Although there are a group of angels who have been kept imprisoned and chained until Judgment Day, Satan and his forces are operating in the atmosphere of earth, not in the flames of hell (Job 1:7; Ephesians 2:2; 6:12). (Let us note that even Jesus did not send the demons into the Abyss- Luke 8:31-32). When we cast out demons, we don't need to direct them anywhere. We only need to command them to leave the person.

Don't blaspheme against the devil

We should not call the devil names or treat him in a shameful way. We are clearly commanded not to 'slander' celestial beings (Jude 8).

Don't over-estimate Satan!

- *Recognize that he is only a created being.*

He can never be greater than God (Ezek. 28:15).

He can work only with God's permission. E.g. Job (Job 1:12; 2:6), Peter (Luke 22:31), Legion (Mark 5:12; Luke 8:31).

He is mighty but not almighty. E.g. The finger of God was enough to overpower the kingdom of Satan (Luke 11:20-22); Satan goes around seeking whom he can devour- this shows that he is not successful with everyone (1 Peter 5:8).

He is present but not omnipresent (Job 1:7; 1 Peter 5:8).

- *Recognize that he is a defeated being.*

The Lord Jesus has defeated and disarmed him through His death on the cross (Colossians 2:15; 1 John 3:8). Satan's head has been crushed (Genesis 3:15).

He is always in a 'descending' mode → Dethroned from Heaven, defeated by Jesus, disarmed on the cross, will be detained for 1000 years in the Bottomless Pit, and finally doomed in eternal fire for ever.

- *Recognize that he is a frightened being.*

Often, we are afraid of Satan but the truth is that he is terrified of us! E.g. Jericho and Israel (Joshua 1:1-11, 17; 2:9-11); Elisha and Gehazi (2 Kings 6:15-16); Demons before Jesus (Mark 4:6); Manifestations of the Enemy are a sign of his fear (Mark 9:20).

Note: Every believer has been given authority over Satan (Mark 16:16; Luke 10:19; 1 John 4:4). We can resist Satan and he will flee from us (James 4:7; 1 Peter 5:8-9). We can rebuke and command him in the name of Jesus. We can cast out demonic powers or evil spirits from people.

2. Depend on the Name and Blood of Jesus.

The Name of Jesus speaks of 'who He is' and the Blood of Jesus stands for 'what He has done'.

- Psalm 118:10 → "..... In the name of the Lord I cut them off."

Proverbs 18:10 → "The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run to it and they are safe."

This means that knowing the character and ability of our God will help us to stand firm in warfare and carry out mighty exploits. We do not face the Enemy in our own strength but in the banner of our God. We, therefore, approach him 'in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ'.

The name of Jesus has been exalted above every name such that all creatures must bow down and submit to Him (Philippians 2:9-11). When we proclaim and praise His name, His lordship is revealed and released over that situation.

- Revelation 12:11- "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb..."

The Blood of Jesus is a term which describes the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross and the benefits that come through the Cross. In other words, it stands for the Finished Work of Christ. Eg. Romans 3:25; 1 Peter 1:18-19.

To overcome the Enemy by the Blood means that we uphold and believe in the Finished Work of the Cross. Christ has defeated Satan on the Cross and we stand on the ground of this Finished Work as we face the Enemy. Standing on this base gives us authority and victory.

Note: It is important to remember that the 'Blood of Jesus' is no magic charm. Just by claiming it or chanting it will do no good to anyone. The benefits of the Blood can be experienced in our lives only through faith in God and walking in the light (Romans 3:25; 1 John 1:7).

Again, we can thank God for the Blood and proclaim its benefits- redemption, forgiveness, cleansing, justification, sanctification, protection. But we should not treat it as an unholy thing by sprinkling it wherever we wish- especially on physical articles. The Blood of Jesus is for our 'hearts', to purify us from a guilty conscience and all unrighteousness (Hebrews 10:22; 1 John 1:7, 9).

3. Put on the full Armour of God.

Ephesians 6:11- The apostle Paul compares the Christian to a soldier of the Roman army who was dressed and ready for battle. He then describes the armour that we must be clothed with.

It is given different names in the New Testament- the armour of light (Romans 13:12), the armour of righteousness (2 Corinthians 6:7), and the armour of God (Ephesians 6:11, 13).

The armour of God is not mere pieces of equipment that we put on, it is a lifestyle that we walk in. There are various pieces in the armour.

vs 14- The Belt of Truth

A part of men's clothing, the belt or girdle was a loose garment that came at least to the knees. This would hinder a soldier's movements. So he would tie his belt/girdle tightly around his waist in such a way that the tunic would no longer flap freely and hinder him. The belt helped to hold things together. This is what truth does in our lives. It holds our life together bringing order and preventing it from falling apart. Truth refers to being 'honest, sincere, open, and frank'. We must be people of truth in thought, word, and deed; having a clear conscience in the context of our personal lives and dealings with other people.

vs 14- The Breastplate of Righteousness

The breastplate would protect the most vital organ of the human body- the heart (Proverbs 4:23). Righteousness is needed in the core of our beings. While we are already considered as righteous in Christ, we must live out that righteousness in practical holiness (2 Corinthians 5:21; Hebrews 12:14).

vs 15- The Shoes of the Gospel of Peace

The shoes were strong, heavy sandals with thongs to keep them in place. They were laced at least half-way up the calf with leather thongs. This helped the soldier to march long distances at great speed. It made him mobile and readily available to the commander.

The believer must be ready to share the Gospel or speak of the Lord Jesus Christ at all times. Being an 'active witness' is a key element for victory in spiritual warfare. We should not be ashamed of the Gospel but ever prepared to testify (2 Timothy 1:8).

Paul describes this weapon as the Gospel of 'Peace'. This is because the Gospel is essentially about helping estranged sinners to be reconciled with God.

vs 16- The Shield of Faith

There were two kinds of shields. One was a small, circular shield shaped more or less like a large, round flat wicker basket. The other one was a long, rectangular shield which was shaped like a door. It is the latter that is referred to here. The Roman soldier could use this shield so that no part of his body could be reached by the missiles of the enemy. It protected him completely.

We, too, have a shield which can help extinguish all the fiery attacks of the Enemy. It is the shield of 'faith'. Faith in God causes us to stand firm in the heat of the battle and helps us to repel all his flaming arrows. It is active, aggressive faith that we need!

vs 17- The Helmet of Salvation

The helmet protects the head. In our context, it refers to the protection of our minds. The battlefield on which the entire spiritual war is being fought is the mind of humanity. This is why it is vital that we protect our minds or guard our thoughts.

How do we protect our minds? 1 Thessalonians 5:8 tells us that the helmet we must put on is the 'hope of salvation'. This means that our thoughts must always be filled with hope- a confidence in our God, an assurance that He is our Father and we are His children.

vs 18- The Sword of the Spirit

The Sword is the Word of God. This is the weapon that causes us to cut asunder the schemes and strategies of Satan. The Scriptures picture the Word as a weapon which is sharper than any double-edged sword because it can pierce and penetrate.

The Greek word Paul uses when he speaks of the Word of God is 'rhema', which always primarily means a spoken word. When we take the Scripture in our mouth and declare it, it becomes the sword that the Spirit uses to defeat the Enemy.

vs 18- Prayer in the Spirit

Prayer causes Satan's plans to be thwarted and defeated. As we pray, God's angels are released on our behalf and mighty breakthroughs take place. Examples- Daniel 10:12, Luke 22:41-43; Acts 12.

Praying in the Spirit is not primarily referring to praying in tongues. It is referring to prayers that are birthed and led by the Spirit. For this, it is essential to live as a Spirit-filled believer.

Note: In this whole armour that Paul mentions, there is no weapon to protect the back of the soldier. This tells us, first of all, that there is no turning back for the Christian- we must not give up but must endure in our fight with the Enemy. And it also tells us that as in the Roman army, where one soldier

protected the back of another, we must stand united and defend one another in our fight against the powers of darkness.

4. Adopt a lifestyle of Worship.

The essence of worship is surrender. From this heart, there must be expressions of worship in the form of praise declarations and songs.

To praise God is to rejoice in Him. When we are filled with His joy, we are renewed in strength and our faith is built up thus causing us to face the Enemy and triumph over him. It helps prepare the way for us to wrestle against spiritual forces of wickedness and witness the glory of God in our lives (Psalm 50:23).

Truly, praise causes the foe and the avenger to be silenced (Psalm 8:2; Matthew 21:16). It brings about total destruction of the Enemy's works (Psalm 149:6-9).

Throughout the Scriptures, we see how singing God's praises helped people see the glory of God revealed in their midst (2 Chronicles 5:13-14) and the defeat of their enemies in battle (2 Chronicles 20).

Lesson 9: SERVING GOD'S PURPOSE

"For when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep...." (Acts 13:36 NIV)

What a glorious way to sum up one's life! Served God's purpose! We have all been at funerals and visited cemeteries. But there are very few of whom it can be confidently said or decisively engraved on tombstones: "This one served God's purpose and fell asleep".

There are five basic truths we need to build our life upon in order to serve God's purpose.

1. A healthy self-image (John 13:3-4).

A person who is full of a sense of uselessness and unworthiness will never be able to rise up and accomplish anything of eternal value. He will be numb, ineffective and unable to lead a fruitful life. Infact, such a person will always be wallowing in self-pity and looking for others to serve and make him happy rather than doing anything beneficial for others.

"What is the picture you have concerning yourself? What are you saying about yourself to yourself and to others? On what basis have you formed such an opinion about yourself?"

Many see themselves as the world sees them. But this is a flawed way of looking at oneself because the world relates to us and gives us a sense of worth and importance based on our beauty, performance and achievements. This judgment is based purely on external characteristics, not on the inner person. How you see yourself must be exactly as God sees you. The real you is who God says you are- nothing more, nothing less!

A whole new identity emerges when we believe in Christ. Now each one of us becomes a child of God (John 1:12), a friend of Christ (John 15:15), a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Corinthians 3:16), more than a conqueror (Romans 8:36), a saint (Ephesians 1:1), a member of Christ's body- the church (Ephesians 1:7), and much, much more!

No longer should we look upon ourselves as anything less than what God has decreed concerning us. It is a sin not only to think of ourselves more highly than we ought (Romans 12:3), but also to see ourselves as less than what we are in Christ (Acts 10:15).

When we see ourselves as God sees us and accept ourselves as who we are in Christ, we will not need titles, degrees, positions, or possessions to make us feel good and important. We will not be moved or controlled by the opinions of others. We will not envy others' gifts or glorify our own. We will also not

relate to other people based on their colour, currency or caste.

2. A clear goal (Philippians 3:12-14).

It is impossible to accomplish anything if we do not aim at anything! It is having a clear understanding of God's purpose for our lives that motivates us and stirs us to action. It is the destination that gives us the desire and the drive to move on from where we presently are.

Jesus was able to bring glory to His Father because He knew exactly what He was required to do (Luke 4:17-21). Paul was able to fight the good fight and run his race victoriously because he had an aim, a clear vision from Heaven for his life (Acts 26:19; 1 Corinthians 9:26). The apostle Peter also knew what his calling was (Galatians 2:8).

Many people seem to be confused at this point for they do not know how to discern God's specific will for their lives. But it really is not a matter to be complicated or confused about for when we walk wholeheartedly with the Lord, we will know what is in His heart concerning us (Psalm 25:9, 12, 14).

The Scriptures are very clear concerning what God requires us to do 'generally' as believers. When we obey God faithfully in these matters, what is expected of us 'specifically' as individuals will become clear to us. When we acknowledge the Lord in all our ways, He will make all our paths straight (Proverbs 3:6). And even further, the gifts, abilities, desires, and burden within us all serve to confirm the purpose for which God has created us.

3. A confident spirit (Deuteronomy 31:7-8; Joshua 6:1-9; 2 Timothy 4:18).

A person who is wholly committed to serving God's purpose will undoubtedly face innumerable trials and temptations (Acts 14:22; 2 Timothy 3:12). There will be many challenges and obstacles along the way. This is why we must be confident in the Lord and strong in spirit.

God told Joshua several times that he needed to be confident in order to complete the possession of the Promised Land. David's confidence in his God caused him to face Goliath and slay him. Even when King Saul tried to dissuade him and Goliath played mind games with him, this young boy was confident in the Lord and in what he could do through Him (1 Samuel 17:33-37, 43-47).

We need to be aware of what we cannot do and what we can do! On one hand, we can do nothing in ourselves (John 15:5). But on the other, we can do all things (that we are called to do) through Christ who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13). King Jehoshaphat, prior to an unbelievable victory in the toughest of battles, summed it up well, "We have no power to face this vast army that is attacking us. We do not know what to do, BUT our eyes are upon You" (2 Chronicles 20:12).

It is as we wait upon the Lord regularly, seek His face continually, pray in tongues consistently and meditate on His Word constantly that we will be empowered in our inner man to be more than conquerors in daily life (Psalm 27:4-6; 119:11; Isaiah 40:31; Matthew 26:41; 1 Corinthians 14:4; Ephesians 3:16-21).

4. A wise association (Proverbs 13:20; 23:19-21).

We can never make it on our own! This is why the moment we are included in Christ, we are also placed into the body of Christ, which is the church (Ephesians 1:13; 1 Corinthians 12:13).

We need the advice and wise counsel of other committed believers (Acts 18:24-26). We need the prayers of other believers (Romans 15:30). We need the encouragement of other disciples (Acts 9:26-28; Hebrews 3:13).

It is when we work together with others that we will see total success and fruitfulness in our own lives and congregations. The early church witnessed the glory of the Lord in such abundant measure because they were one in heart and mind (Acts 4:32-33).

5. A regular evaluation (2 Corinthians 13:5; Revelation 2:5).

It is vital for us as believers to examine ourselves regularly. In this long journey, there is every tendency to get distracted and side-tracked as we move on.

There are five key areas we need to always evaluate: our relationship with God, relationship with people, growth in character, quality of serving, and fervency in sharing the Gospel.

We should examine our progress and keep a record of the vital life lessons we know we should never ever forget. God told Moses to keep a written record of the entire journey from Egypt (Numbers 33:2). Joshua was among those Old Testament saints who had memorials erected so that the nation of Israel would not forget the precious works God had wrought for them (Joshua 4:20-24).

A fresh renewal of our commitment to do God's will and a daily dependence upon the Spirit of God will cause us to triumph and reign victorious till the very end.