

**Glenville New Life Community Church
&
Calvary Presbyterian Church**

Life-Sharing Series

Insanity For Christ



Lesson 1 “Who Is God—Why Jesus”

Lesson 2 “Who Am I—Why Am I Here”

Lesson 3 “What’s The Cost”

Lesson 4 “Fanatic Of Fair Weather Fan”

Lesson 5 “Picking Up Your Cross”

Lesson 6 “Own Your Potential

Lesson 7 Walk The Walk



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Lay Pastor/Teacher Edition**

Life Sharing Lesson 1 “Insanity for Christ: Who is God – Why Jesus?” Isaiah 45:5-10 Luke 4:16-20

Commentary Material on Passages Isaiah 45:1-13

[45:1-4](#). Besides issuing a decree permitting the captives to return home, **Cyrus** also avenged God’s wrath on the **nations**. Amazingly the Lord called Cyrus **His anointed**. The word “anointed” referred to the relationship Israel’s first two kings, Saul and David, had with God ([1 Sam. 10:1](#); [16:6](#)). Since Israel in exile had no king, Cyrus functioned in a sense as her king (the anointed one) to bring about blessing. Like the Messiah (lit., “the Anointed One”) who would come after him, Cyrus would have a twofold mission: to free the people, and to bring God’s judgment on unbelievers.

Cyrus would easily conquer other nations ([Isa. 45:1b](#)), with God’s help ([v. 2](#)), and would receive wealth from the nations he overcame ([v. 3](#)). This he did in conquering Lydia and Babylon. All this would be **for the sake of Jacob**, God’s **Chosen People** (see [comments](#) on [41:8-9](#)). And even though Cyrus would enjoy a special relationship with God (God called him **by name**; cf. [43:1](#)) and was honored by God, he still was not a believer for he did **not acknowledge** the Lord as the true God.

[45:5-7](#). Again the uniqueness of **God** is stressed. The fact that **there is no other** is stated in [verses 5-6](#), [14](#), [18](#), [21-22](#) (also see [43:11](#); [44:6](#); [46:9](#)). In Cyrus’ day the Lord was not universally acknowledged, but eventually He will be (cf. [Phil. 2:10-11](#)). People will realize that all that happens—**light** (life), **darkness** (death), **prosperity**, and **disaster** (not “evil” as in the KJV; cf. [Amos 3:6](#))—comes from God. As the sovereign **LORD** of the universe He can **do** everything.

[45:8](#). When the millennial kingdom is established on the earth the **heavens**, figuratively speaking, will **rain down righteousness** (God’s standards will be followed). And **salvation**, like a great harvest, will **spring up**. That is, people everywhere will know **the LORD** (cf. [v. 6](#); [11:9](#); [Hab. 2:14](#)).

God’s sovereignty in Creation ([45:9-13](#))

[45:9-13](#). The Lord can work sovereignly over individuals on **the earth** because He **created** it. When someone who is created voices disapproval of the Creator’s work he risks receiving a pronouncement of impending doom (**woe**, [vv. 9-10](#); cf. [comments](#) on [3:9](#)) from **the LORD**. A **potsherd**, a broken, discarded piece of pottery, has no right to question **the potter**. Nor does a child have the right to question why his parents **brought** him into the world. In the same way **Israel** has no right to question God her **Maker** ([45:9](#), [11](#)), the world’s Creator ([v. 12](#)), in His plans to **raise up Cyrus** ([v. 13](#)). Cyrus’ task was again stated: to allow freed **exiles** to rebuild God’s **city**, Jerusalem (cf. [44:28](#)).

The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

45 1-25 the Deliverance of the Jews by Cyrus

1-13 These verses are concerned with the restoration of Jerusalem by Cyrus' decree.

1 his anointed—Cyrus is so called because he was set apart to accomplish God's special purpose. It must have been shocking to the Jews for a foreign king to be likened to David, a messianic king (Herbert). Nevertheless, the sovereign creator of heaven and earth was fully controlling events to bring about his purposes for Israel.

subdue nations—Cyrus successfully conquered the Cilicians, Syrians, Babylonians, Lydians, and Bactrians. The extent of his conquests is attested in the Babylonian chronicle and in Persian records (*ANET*, 306, 315-316) as well as in the writings of classical historians such as Herodotus. **to open ... gates**—No city gate would be an obstacle to him (Grogan).

2 crooked ... straight—Cf. [40:4](#). God will go before them and clear away any opposition or obstacle. **gates of brass**—rather, bronze. Herodotus (1.179) states that Babylon had one hundred iron gates with posts of brass, twenty-five on each of its four sides. Wooden city gates were often covered with bronze to offer protection against burning by invaders.

3 treasures of darkness—Cyrus conquered and took booty from many nations, including the wealthy Croesus of Sardis. Pliny (*Natural History*, 33.3) states that from his conquest of Asia, Cyrus collected 34,000 pounds of gold, 500,000 pieces of silver, and the goblet of Semiramis weighing fifteen talents.

4 surnamed—Although Cyrus was the most powerful man in his day, God named him. To name something or someone is an expression of one's superiority over that which is named ([Gen. 1:5, 8; 2:19, 20; 2 Kings 23:34](#)).

5 though thou hast not known me—God chooses his people as his tools even before they know him ([John 15:16; Gal. 4:9](#)) or even if they do not acknowledge him.

6 Israel's restoration, through Cyrus's agency, will lead to the universal recognition of Yahweh as the sole God. This recognition may not be immediate, however (Young).

7 light ... darkness—In Persian religious thought, these two forces were seen as opposites, whereas here God claims to be the creator of both (Watts). **create evil**—does not mean that he brings about moral evil ([James 1:13](#)), rather "evil" means disaster or judgment, the opposite of peace (Grogan) ([Pss. 65:7; Amos 3:6](#)).

8 Drop—the fertilizing rain ([Pss. 65:12](#)), a sign of covenant blessing ([Lev. 26:4; Deut. 11:13, 14](#)). **skies**—used in parallelism with "heavens," the source of all blessing. **righteousness ... salvation**—The parallelism between these terms shows their close synonymous relationship. Indeed rain is a source of life

(salvation) in the hot, dry climate of the Middle East. These material blessings are part of God's creation too.

9 The prophet attacks those who were reluctant to believe that God would use such a human agent to fulfill his purposes for Israel (Knight). On the potter and the clay, see notes on [29:16](#).

10 Just as it is absurd for the pot to give orders to the potter, so too the baby has no ability to question his parents, who gave him birth. Similarly, it is absurd for Israel, whom God created ([44:21](#), [24](#)), to question his decisions.

11 Ask ... command—God is saying, "Who do you think you are, Israel, to question me about my actions!" He reminds them again ([45:12](#)) that he is not only creator of the cosmos, but the maker of mankind.

13 him—i.e., Cyrus. **in righteousness**—Victorious is another nuance of righteous (see notes on [41:2](#)), but it can also mean legitimate (Watts). In view of the questioning of their deliverance coming at the hand of a pagan, which some Jews apparently found objectionable, God states that Cyrus is righteous, legitimate, and designated by God.

Old Testament: Based on the Classic Commentary of Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown.

Commentary On Luke 4:16-20

[4:17-21](#) **The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."**^{NIV} This key passage sets the tone for a key theme in Luke. Jesus was concerned for both the spiritual restoration of people and their actual physical needs. Several parts of the service had already been performed while Jesus sat and worshiped (see commentary on [4:16](#)). After the Law had been read, Jesus was asked to read from the Prophets. Thus, *the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him*. Scrolls were ancient "books" made of papyrus sewn together to make a long strip that was then wound around sticks at each end. Some scrolls were only a few feet long; others might be thirty-five feet long with writing on both sides. Thus Jesus had to unroll the book by *unrolling* one side and rolling the other side until *he found the place* from which he wanted to read. It is unclear whether Jesus asked for this particular scroll, or whether it was handed to him and then he chose the reading. But the ancient words of hope and restoration came to life on the lips of the one about whom those words had prophesied.

Jesus read from [Isaiah 61:1-2](#). Isaiah's words pictured the deliverance of Israel from exile in Babylon as a Year of Jubilee when all debts were to be canceled, all

slaves freed, and all property returned to original owners ([Leviticus 25](#)). But the release from Babylonian exile had not brought the fulfillment that the people had expected; they were still a conquered and oppressed people. Isaiah was prophesying a future messianic age, a time when one would come in *the Spirit of the Lord*, . . . *anointed to preach good news to the poor . . . freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor*. This passage offered great expectations to an oppressed people.

The Jews wondered about this passage and what it meant for them. So after reading, **he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, "Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."**^{NIV} As Jesus read this passage from Isaiah to the people in the synagogue, he stopped in the middle of [61:2](#) after the words "to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." Rolling up the scroll, he *sat down*. To show respect for Scripture, he had stood as he read; then he sat down, the traditional pose for teaching. Jesus' words shocked his hearers. Commenting on this passage in Isaiah, he said, *"Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing."* (The next phrase in [Isaiah 61:2](#), however, is "and the day of vengeance of our God." This will not be fulfilled until Jesus returns to earth again. We are now under God's favor; his wrath is yet to come.)

When Jesus spoke these words, he was proclaiming himself as the one who would bring this good news to pass. He was the "Anointed" One, a king in the line of David, the King through whom the promises to David would be fulfilled. Jesus had come to evangelize the poor, proclaim freedom, give sight to the blind, and release the oppressed. We must not spiritualize away Jesus' concerns for the poor and physically needy. Neither may we collapse all his words into the single desire for social restoration. Jesus' ministry, as the promised Messiah, would focus on calling people back to God—those who saw their need, such as the poor, the outcasts, the disabled, and the Gentiles. Jesus fulfilled every prophecy about him, but in a way that many of the Jews were unable to grasp. They pictured their Messiah as a conqueror who would free them from Rome. Instead, Jesus was a conqueror who would free them from sin—the sin that had caused their captivity and oppression in the first place—and restore them to wholeness.

Life Sharing Lesson 1 “Insanity for Christ: Who is God – Why Jesus?”
Isaiah 45:5-10 Luke 4:16-20

1. What was your first image of God as child?

At times I thought God was watching you just waiting for you to make a mistake so He could get you. I also had this idea that God could also be like Santa Claus, that if you believed in him hard enough, you could get just about anything your wanted.

2. What was the first major disappointment you had with God and how did it affect you?

When I was injured in a football game and told I could no longer play football at age 17. I was certain I had struck a deal with God for His protection by me going to church. My disappointment led to me coming to giving my life to Christ. I realized that it's not all about me and what I want, but what God desires for me.

Isaiah 45:5-13 Today's New International Version (TNIV)

⁵ I am the LORD, and there is no other; apart from me there is no God. I will strengthen you, though you have not acknowledged me, ⁶ so that from the rising of the sun to the place of its setting people may know there is none besides me. I am the LORD, and there is no other. ⁷ I form the light and create darkness, I bring prosperity and create disaster; I, the LORD, do all these things.

⁸ “You heavens above, rain down my righteousness; let the clouds shower it down. Let the earth open wide, let salvation spring up, let righteousness flourish with it; I, the LORD, have created it. ⁹ “Woe to those who quarrel with

their Maker, those who are nothing but potsherds among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?' Does your work say, 'The potter has no hands'?

¹⁰ Woe to those who say to their father, 'What have you begotten?' or to their mother, 'What have you brought to birth?' ¹¹ "This is what the LORD says— the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands? ¹² It is I who made the earth and created human beings on it. My own hands stretched out the heavens; I marshaled their starry hosts. ¹³ I will raise up Cyrus^[b] in my righteousness: I will make all his ways straight. He will rebuild my city and set my exiles free, but not for a price or reward, says the LORD Almighty."

3. Based on this passage of Scripture, do you think God feels as though God has a claim upon our lives. Why or Why not?

God not only appears to think God has a claim on our lives, God also reserves the right to dictate who and what we are going to be. As our Creator, God realizes that we would not exist without him. Also God raises up others for the sole purpose of getting us to a particular spot. King Cyrus did not even know God, yet God created Him in order to send the Jewish people out of Bablyon to Jerusalem. God had told the Jews they would go into exile for 70 years, and now that the 70 years are up, God is sending them back home. God does not wait for us to acknowledge Him for God to have a claim upon us. God's creation of us is His claim, just as the birth of a child gives a parent a claim on the child.

4. What if anything do you think you owe God and why?

Although I know I should owe God everything, there are times when I hold back on giving my will and my plans for myself over to God. I think I owe God everything, because God is not only my Creator, God is what makes it possible for my physical life to keep going. I can't make my heart beat or keep my lungs breathing. Without God, I would have no hope of any type of spiritual life after death.

5. With all the evil that takes place in the world, why does a holy and righteous God seem to be interested in having a relationship with human beings? Is God heading down the path of insanity?

God is love. God never stopped loving Adam and Eve. God had to punish sin, but that did not stop God from being love. When you truly love someone, it may seem as though you are traveling down a path of insanity when the person does not respond in kind. People will say, you just need to forget the person and move on. For centuries God has chosen not to move on, because God created us to be in a living relationship with God.

Luke 4:16-20. New International Version (NIV)¹⁶ He (Jesus) went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. He stood up to read, ¹⁷ and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written:

¹⁸ “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free, ¹⁹ to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor.”^[a] ²⁰ Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him.

5. Who is it that has appointed Jesus to do these things, and what do you think is the motivation behind it all?

Jesus knew that He had been appointed by God the Father to come into this world to bring people back to God. God has been motivated for centuries to restore the broken relationship that existed between God and human beings. God’s love

includes everybody. He makes it known that there are no outcasts or sinners that are beyond the scope of God's love.

6. In this passage, Jesus announces five things that He was sent to do. Which of the five did you or do you recognize as the greatest need for in your life?

1. Proclaim good news to the poor 2. Proclaim freedom for prisoners. 3. Recovery of sight for the blind. 4. Set the oppressed free. 5. Proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

I think at the time, I needed to be set free from a false sense of what would bring me happiness in this world. I had believed that money, fame and sex were the things to pursue in life if you wanted to have a great life. I needed to have that mindset shattered in order to open my heart to God.

7. Why do you matter so much to Jesus?

I matter to Jesus so much because I matter to God my Creator. God knew that I was in Adam and Eve, and God wanted me to be saved. God wanted me to know Him.

8. Why is neglecting Jesus in your daily life a form of insanity, especially for believers?

We tell people that God has a wonderful plan for your life, and then we act as though that plan ends once you give your life to Christ. If God has the best plan for our lives, then allowing Jesus to live in and through us is going to give us the greatest reward at the end of each day. We however push Jesus to the side to get

our own way and only use him when there's an emergency. Then we are shocked when we mess up our lives and will even ask ourselves the question "how did I mess up my life like this." We do it by neglecting Jesus on a daily basis. We choose the negative form of insanity.

9. What keeps Jesus' death on the cross from being an act of insanity?

Jesus said, "no one takes my life from me. I voluntarily lay it down." Jesus knew that the work that would take place on the cross, would make it possible for our sins to be forgiven and for us to be able to enter into a right relationship with God. Jesus also knew the rest of the story before going to the cross. He knew there was a resurrection on the other side.

John 10:18*Today's New International Version (TNIV)¹⁸ No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again. This command I received from my Father."*

10. How does the death of Jesus, increase your value in the eyes of God?

I have been paid for in full. There is nothing that can keep me from coming into a relationship with God if I desire to do so. I am now on the Lord's side. 1 Peter 1:18-19

¹⁸ *For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, ¹⁹ but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect.*

11. What is it that makes Jesus different from all the other religious leaders that have come into the world?

*Jesus is the only one that said he would prove who He was, by being killed. He is the only one that had over 500 witnesses to see him after he had risen from the dead. See the passages below: But even more important than that is that Jesus himself claimed to be God and that is why the leaders wanted to kill him. **John 5:17-18 (NIV)***

¹⁷ Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I, too, am working." ¹⁸ For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.

¹⁸ The Jews then responded to him, "What sign can you show us to prove your authority to do all this?" ¹⁹ Jesus answered them, "Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days." ²⁰ They replied, "It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and you are going to raise it in three days?" ²¹ But the temple he had spoken of was his body. ²² After he was raised from the dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken. John 2:18-22

³ For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance^[a]: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, ⁴ that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ⁵ and that he appeared to Cephas,^[b] and then to the Twelve. ⁶ After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep. ⁷ Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles, ⁸ and last of all he appeared to me also, as to one abnormally born. 1 Corinthians 15:3-4

12. What is closest to the truth about your relationship to God today?

1. I'm not sure there is a God.
2. I believe in God, but I'm not ready to follow God.

3. I believe in God, and I want to follow God, but I need time.
4. I believe in God and I am a fan God.
5. I believe in God and I am a follower of God.

13. How are you doing with your devotions and remembering your morning prayer, "Good morning God. What Is Your Plan For Us Today?"

Life Sharing Lesson 2 “Insanity for Christ: Who am I?- Why Am I Here Psalm 139:13-18, 1 Peter 2:9, John 1:10-12

Commentary Material

Psalm 139:13-18 1

God Made Us Wonderfully—We Cannot Ignore Him ([vv. 13-18](#))

This is one of the greatest passages in literature about the miracle of human conception and birth. "In the presence of birth," said Eugene Petersen, "we don't calculate—we marvel." David declared that God is present at conception and birth, because we are made in the image of God and God has a special purpose for each person who is born. We live in and with our bodies all our lives, and we know how amazing they are. God formed us as He wants us to be, and we must accept His will no matter how we feel about our genetic structure, our looks, or our abilities. The verb "covered" ([v. 13](#), KJV) means "woven together" (see [Isa. 32:12](#)), and "intricately wrought" in [verse 15](#) is translated "embroidered" in Exodus. In the mother's womb, the Lord weaves and embroiders a human being, and abortion interrupts this miracle. What a tragedy!

But the Lord did more than design and form our bodies; He also planned and determined our days ([v. 16](#)). This probably includes the length of life ([Job 14:5](#)) and the tasks He wants us to perform ([Eph. 2:10](#); [Phil. 2:12-13](#)). This is not some form of fatalism or heartless predestination, for what we are and what He plans for us come from God's loving heart ([33:11](#)) and are the very best He has for us ([Rom. 12:2](#)). If we live foolishly, we might die before the time God has ordained, but God's faithful children are immortal until their work is done. How can we ignore God when He has given us such a marvelous body and planned for us a wonderful life? Life is not a prison, it is an exciting pilgrimage, and the Lord has prepared us for what He prepared for us. Our responsibility is to yield ourselves to Him daily, ponder His thoughts found in His Word ([92:5](#); [Isa. 55:8-9](#)), and walk in the Spirit. God thinks of us! ([Jer. 29:11](#)). Should we not think about Him?

Bible Exposition Commentary - Bible Exposition Commentary – Be Exultant (Psalms 90-150).

Psalm 139:13-18 2

C. The omnipotence of the Lord ([139:13-18](#))

The thought that darkness cannot conceal anyone from the Lord ([vv. 11-12](#)) brought to David's mind this meditation in [verses 13-18](#): God knew all about him when He created him in his mother's womb. [Verse 13](#) begins with "For," indicating that this strophe ([vv. 13-18](#)) explains the preceding two strophes ([vv. 1-6](#), [7-12](#)):

since God can create a person, He certainly knows him intimately and is with him everywhere.

[139:13-14](#). The theme of [verses 13-18](#) is announced here: the Lord (**You** is emphatic in Heb.; cf. [v. 2](#)) **created** him **in his mother's womb**. The language is figurative in that creating and knitting describe God's sovereign superintendence over the natural process of reproduction (on knitting; cf. [Job. 10:11](#)).

This fact prompted the psalmist to break forth in **praise** over the thought of how marvelously he had been **made**. Even David's rudimentary knowledge of the marvels of the human body led him to be in awe and wonder. The words **wonderfully** and **wonderful** are mindful of God's marvelous knowledge ([Ps. 139:6](#)).

[139:15-16](#). Then David stressed certain features of God's superintendence over him. In the womb he **was woven together** (lit., "embroidered"; cf. "knit," [v. 13](#), suggesting his veins and arteries). When he was being formed in the womb he was as remote to the human eye as the lower part **of the earth** (cf. [comments](#) on [Job 1:21](#)). But God **saw** every detail. David's **frame** means his skeleton and his **unformed body** is his embryo. Moreover, God prerecorded **all the days** of the psalmist before he was even born. This statement may mean that God determined how long he would live, but in view of [verses 1-4](#), it more likely refers to everyday details. God marvelously planned out his life.

[139:17-18](#). This thought led David to conclude that the Lord's plans (**thoughts**; cf. [v. 2](#)) for His people are most **precious** and in fact are innumerable. They are also most relevant, for each morning when he awakened, God was **still with** him, extending His thoughts toward him.

The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures by Dallas Seminary Faculty.

Psalm 139:13-18 3

[11, 12](#) Even in the hiddenness of darkness the psalmist experiences God's presence.

[13-16](#) The psalmist here turns to his formation while in his mother's womb as the beginning point of God's knowledge of him and protective care even though he was totally hidden from men's view. This passage has much to say to the abortion issue of modern times. **possessed my reins**—lit. "created my kidneys." The kidneys were viewed as the emotional center or innermost part. **covered me in my mother's womb**—better, "knit me together" (NIV). This refers to his formation in his mother's womb as being lovingly overseen by God. **praise thee**—The hidden wonders of the formation of a child in the mother's womb provide the psalmist with a basis for praising God. As man increases his scientific understanding of these processes, his praise to God should also increase. **My substance**—i.e., "My frame"

(NIV), meaning bone structure. **lowest parts of the earth**—coming from the dust and returning to it ([Job 1:21](#)). **thy book**—The place where such information was stored. Nothing was lost.

17, 18 Such personal reflections turn the psalmist to appreciate the magnitude, majesty, and loving involvement of God, resulting in a continuous flow of praise. **sand**—Cf. [Genesis 22:17](#).

Old Testament: Based on the Classic Commentary of Jamieson, Fausset, and Brown.

Commentary 1 Peter 2:9

2:9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.^{NKJV} This verse contrasts the privilege and destiny of believers with that of unbelievers (described in [2:8](#)).

Believers are *a chosen generation*, a distinct group from the rest of the world, unified by the Holy Spirit. Isaiah prophesied God's blessings on those God called "my people, my chosen" ([Isaiah 43:20](#) NIV; see also [Deuteronomy 10:15](#)). Just as the nation of Israel had been God's chosen people, Christians have become God's people, not by physical birth into a certain race but by spiritual rebirth into God's family through Jesus Christ.

Believers also are *a royal priesthood, a holy nation* ([1:1](#); [Ephesians 2:19](#)). At Mount Sinai when the nation received God's laws, Moses had told all Israel: "And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" ([Exodus 19:6](#) NKJV). In [2:5](#), Peter referred to believers as "a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (NIV). Being part of a "priesthood" is a high honor for believers. Christians speak of "the priesthood of all believers." In Old Testament times, people did not approach God directly. Instead, a priest would act as intermediary between God and sinful human beings. With Christ's victory on the cross, that pattern changed. Now believers can come directly into God's presence without fear ([Hebrews 4:16](#)). Also, they have been given the responsibility of bringing others to him ([2 Corinthians 5:18-21](#)). United with Christ as members of his body, believers join in his priestly work of reconciling God and people. This priesthood is called "royal" because believers have become members of God's family, brothers and sisters of Christ, the King of kings. As members of the King's family, we are royalty! "Holy nation" refers to Christians as a people who are distinct from all the others because of their devotion to God.

Believers are God's *own special people*. This phrase is more literally translated "a people for his possession." Similar language is found in [Exodus 19:5](#) ("Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to Me above all people" NKJV) and in [Malachi 3:17](#) ("They will be

mine,' says the Lord Almighty, 'in the day when I make up my treasured possession'" (NIV). God's "special people," his "special treasure," and his "treasured possession" are those who are faithful to him; thus this refers to Christians.

The remainder of the [Isaiah 43:21](#) verse quoted in the preceding paragraph reads, "that they may proclaim my praise" (NIV). This ties in with Peter's explanation of what God's special people are to do: *proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light*. Christians were not redeemed just so they could enjoy their redemption and proclaim their own praises; they were redeemed with a special purpose—to glorify and praise the one who has called them out of the darkness of sin and of their hostile surroundings into the light of eternal life. The word "praises" is also translated "wonderful deeds" or "excellencies" (referring to moral excellence and virtue). We are called to "proclaim" who God is and what he has done, specifically the act of salvation. We proclaim him by

- *conducting* our lives so that they manifest his character, and
- *telling* others of the salvation he accomplished for us and of his work in our individual lives.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – 1 & 2 Peter and Jude.

COMMENTARY John 1:10-12

1:10 The world did not recognize him.^{NIV}

John notes one of the greatest tragedies: the world—humankind—did not recognize its own Creator. They were blinded and could not see his light. Although Christ created the world, the people he created didn't recognize him. He was denied the general acknowledgment that should have been his as Creator.

Man does not recognize the place he should fill. He has obviously gone astray. He has fallen from the true status, and he cannot find it again. So he searches everywhere anxiously but in vain, in the midst of great darkness.

Blaise Pascal

1:11 He came to His own.^{NKJV} In Greek this reads, "He came to his own things"—that is, he came to that which belonged to him. The expression can even be used to describe a homecoming. This phrase intensifies the description of Christ's rejection. Jesus was not welcome in the world, or even his home. *His own* refers to God's chosen nation, Israel, which was particularly Christ's.

His own did not receive Him.^{NKJV} According to the Greek, this means that his own family did not receive him. The Greek word for *receive* means "to welcome." The Jews did not welcome Jesus. Those who should have been most eager to welcome him were the first to turn away. As a nation, they rejected their Messiah. This

rejection is further described at the end of Jesus' ministry ([12:37-41](#)). Isaiah had foreseen this unbelief ([Isaiah 53:1-3](#)).

In spite of the rejection described here, John steers clear of passing sentence on the world. Instead, he turns our attention on those who did welcome Christ in sincere faith.

1:12 But as many as received Him.^{NKJV} Though the rejection of Christ was universal, individuals did respond personally. The Greek root word translated "received" here is also used in [verse 11](#) in the sense of welcoming (paralambano); here it carries the sense of accepting (lambano). To receive Jesus is to welcome and acknowledge him as our Savior and Lord.

LIFE APPLICATION

INSIDE OUT

All who welcome Jesus Christ as Lord of their lives are reborn spiritually, receiving new life from God. Through faith in Christ, the Holy Spirit changes us from the inside out—rearranging attitudes, desires, and motives. Being born makes us physically alive and places us in our parents' family ([1:13](#)). Being born of God makes us spiritually alive and joins us with God's family ([1:12](#)). The question then becomes, Have you received Christ in order that he can make you a new person? God makes this fresh start in life available to all who believe in Christ.

To them He gave the right to become children of God, to those who believe in His name.^{NKJV} In Greek *right* means "authority or permission." In this context, it speaks of God granting the right or giving the privilege for the new birth. No one can attain this new birth by his or her own power, merit, or ability. Only God can grant it.

The Greek word for *children* emphasizes the idea of birth, which Jesus expands in [chapter 3](#). The new birth comes only *to those who believe*. To believe in Jesus' name is to believe in his person—who he is and what he represents.

LIFE APPLICATION

RECEIVING AND BELIEVING

"To believe" parallels "receive" as another aspect of our relationship with Christ. It leaves no doubt that we need to make a conscious personal response. Receiving and believing indicate informed awareness, not blind or empty faith. Receiving and believing have a personal object—Jesus Christ. The object of our faith is not a system, tradition, or organization. When we receive and believe in Jesus Christ, he gives us the privilege of becoming children of God.

Many believed superficially in Jesus when they saw his miracles, but they did not believe in Jesus as the Son of God. They "believed" in him while he fulfilled their

expectations of what the Messiah should be, but they left him when he defied their preconceived notions. We must believe in Jesus as Jesus, the Son of God; we must wholeheartedly believe in Jesus, not limiting him to our ideas and misconceptions; we must regard Jesus as the Bible truly presents him.

LIFE APPLICATION

ALL IN THE FAMILY

John claims that those who do not believe in Jesus are not children of God. We expect to hear a chorus of protest: "Aren't we all children of God?"

What do we say to those who claim that every person is a child of God? We are all children of God in the sense that God has created each person and given each of us life and light. But God is more than Creator; he is the Guide and Controller. The question remains, What kind of children are we? A child can merely live in a home, partaking of benefits without love or gratitude for the father. Such a child neither cooperates nor truly helps the father. Those claiming that every person is God's child generally mean, "I want all the privileges but none of the responsibilities." God's true children follow him in commitment, gratitude, friendship, and fellowship. What kind of child are you?

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – John.

**Life Sharing Lesson 2 “Insanity for Christ: Who am I?- Why Am I Here
Psalm 139:13-18, 1 Peter 2:9, John 1:10-12**

1. When someone asks you “who are you”, what’s the first three pieces of information that you give about yourself?

My Name, my job, and my marital status

2. What are two things you feel you need to accomplish before you die to feel as though your life had meaning?

To know that my family thought I did a good job as a husband, father and son. To feel as though I completed the work that God called me to do in the ministry.

Psalm 139”13-18 ¹³ For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. ¹⁴ I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made ;your works are wonderful, I know that full well. ¹⁵ My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, ¹⁶ your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be.

¹⁷ How precious to me are your thoughts, ^[a] God! How vast is the sum of them!

¹⁸ Were I to count them, they would outnumber the grains of sand—when I awake, I am still with you.

3. If you really believe that God put you together in your mother’s womb, what kind of affect should that have on your life?

First, I would know that I am not an accident. Second, I would know that I was created with a purpose. Third, I would know that I am not alone in this world. Fourth, I would know that God is interested in me. Fifth, I would know that God knows me better than I know myself. I can walk through this life knowing that I am somebody.

4. What is something that God has created uniquely about you?

God created me with a desire to find out how things work so I can repair them?

1 Peter 2:9 Today's New International Version (TNIV) ⁹ But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.

5. What does it mean to be called "out of darkness into his wonderful light?"

Before coming to Christ, we are blinded by the reality of who Christ is. The apostle Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4:4 Today's New International Version (TNIV) ⁴ The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel that displays the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

We are stumbling in darkness and do not really know it, because the darkness seems natural. When God calls us, we find there is a new light shining upon the light we are living. Things we use to see as natural to our nature, are seen as sin. We see God's hand working for our good in ways that we never could see before.

6. When was it that you realized you were actually in darkness?

I realized I was actually in darkness when my plans for my life failed. When I saw that God was far greater than I had ever imagined God to be, I was confronted with my own sin and need for repentance. To walk with God would have to be done on God's terms and not my own. I had thought I could be in a relationship with God without having to go through the repentance process.

7. Are we a chosen people, a royal priesthood, and a holy nation because we chose to follow God or because God decided to choose us?

It was God who established the chosen people, the royal priesthood and the holy nation. God chose us to be a part of it by issuing us the invitation to join in with Him. Without the creation and the invitation extended to us, we could never have become a part of the kingdom of God. In saying yes to God with our lives, we provided ourselves the opportunity to receive what God already had in store for us.

8. Is there a difference in “being created by God” and “being a child of God?” Why or why not. What is a benefit of each?

Yes there is a difference. All of humanity is created by God because all of mankind was made in the image of God in Adam and Eve. God is the creator of all. But to become a child of God is based on receiving a work that God has done on our behalf. We are born into humanity, but we are adopted into the family of God.

Being created by God gives us the benefit of know one having the right to take our lives without a just cause. We are all of value and no human has the right to abuse another. Being a child of God gives us the benefit of being in an intimate relationship with God through the work of Jesus Christ. We have the benefit of salvation and of eternal life.

John 1:10-12

¹⁰ He was in the world, and though the world was made through him, the world did not recognize him. ¹¹ He came to that which was his own, but his own did not receive him. ¹² Yet to all who did receive him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God— ¹³ children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband's will, but born of God.

9. Does believing in God, make you a child of God?

No. The scriptures tell us that the demons believe in God and shudder. Yet that does not make them children of God. There are plenty of people who believe in God, yet they reject Jesus Christ. Jesus tells us to reject the Son is to reject the Father. Jesus even had strong words for a group who were certain they were children of God in John 8: 39-47 ³⁹ "Abraham is our father," they answered. "If you were Abraham's children," said Jesus, "then you would^[d] do what Abraham did. ⁴⁰ As it is, you are looking for a way to kill me, a man who has told you the truth that I heard from God. Abraham did not do such things. ⁴¹ You are doing the works of your own father."

"We are not illegitimate children," they protested. "The only Father we have is God himself."

⁴² Jesus said to them, "If God were your Father, you would love me, for I came from God and now am here. I have not come on my own; but he sent me. ⁴³ Why is my language not clear to you? Because you are unable to hear what I say. ⁴⁴ You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desires. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies. ⁴⁵ Yet because I tell the truth, you do not believe me! ⁴⁶ Can any of you prove me guilty of sin? If I am telling the truth, why don't you believe me? ⁴⁷ Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. The reason you do not hear is that you do not belong to God."

10. What is it that's different about a good moral Muslim and a good moral Christian?

There is not much of a difference in the two. Both of them may appear to be outstanding citizens on the outside. The Muslim is trusting that his/her keeping the law is helping to earn his or her salvation. The Christian is trusting that his/her keeping the law is helping to influence others for Christ, but he/she realizes its not securing his/her salvation. Salvation is guaranteed by the work of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection from the dead.

11. Do you more feel more comfortable declaring to Satan or to God, "I am a child of God." Why?

I feel more comfortable declaring it to Satan than to God. When I say it to Satan, I am declaring my right that Satan has no authority over me. When I say it to God, I seem to have my head bowed down and saying it softly as though I don't deserve to say it too loudly. I think something is wrong with that, but I'm not quite sure why.

12 . Why is declaring to the world, "I am a child of God" likely to be taken as a form of insanity?

The world often sees religion as some kind of crutch that only weak people need. Some in the world think we are declaring some form of superiority over them because they believe, we are all children of God. Some in the world think we're saying we should be treated special because we have this God thing. Some in the world have an opinion of God that's not to good and they immediately associate us with that image. If they hate God, they are certainly going to hate us.

Jesus goes so far as to say this, John 15:18-19 (NIV) ¹⁸ "If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first. ¹⁹ If you belonged to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you.

13. Has anyone asked you, “Who You Are From Wearing Your Button” ? What was your response?

14. Are you keeping up with the devotions and the morning prayer?

Life-Sharing Lesson 3 “ Insanity For Christ: What’s The Cost” Mark 12:28-34, Matthew 6:24

Commentary Mark 12:28-34

[12:28](#) One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, "Of all the commandments, which is the most important?"^{NIV} This discussion continued within the temple courts. Jesus and the disciples were surrounded by a crowd of people, while various groups of religious leaders came and went with their questions.

One of these leaders actually came with a sincere question. He wasn't trying to trick Jesus; he really wanted to learn from him. Note that Jesus was not prejudiced against the Pharisees. He treated each one who was sincere differently from the group. He showed particular interest in a Pharisee named Nicodemus (see [John 3:1-21](#)). This man was a teacher of the law (also called a "scribe"); Matthew explained that he was of the party of Pharisees ([Matthew 22:34-35](#)). He probably was delighted to hear Jesus' definitive answer about the resurrection that finally silenced the Sadducees. So he brought his question: "*Of all the commandments, which is the most important?*"

"All the commandments" the man referred to focused on a popular debate about the more important and less important of the hundreds of laws the Jews had accumulated. The Pharisees had classified over six hundred laws and spent much time discussing which laws were weightier than others. Some religious leaders tried to distinguish between major and minor laws; some taught that all laws were equally binding and that it was dangerous to make any distinctions. The question was not asking Jesus to set up one law as the most important, but to point out which types of commandments should have priority. As a Pharisee himself, the man had in mind the debates over the relative importance of ritual, ethical, moral, and ceremonial laws, as well as the positive versus negative laws. Jesus' definitive answer about the resurrection caused this man to hope he might also have the final answer about all these laws. He wouldn't be disappointed.

[12:29](#) "The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is one.'^{NIV} Among all the Gospel writers, only Mark recorded Jesus' quote from [Deuteronomy 6:4](#), which is the first part of what the Jews know as the Shema (referring to the opening word of the sentence in Hebrew). The Shema is made up from [Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#); [11:13-21](#); [Numbers 15:37-41](#) and is the major creed of Judaism that was recited twice daily (morning and evening) by devout Jews. The teachers of the law could debate all they wanted, but Jesus brought them back to the basics by giving new life to the oft-repeated words *The Lord our God, the Lord is one*. What mattered were not laws and their relative importance; what mattered was a relationship with the one true God.

[12:30](#) "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength."^{NIV} Jesus recited words of the Shema ([12:29](#)), then answered the man's question by explaining what those words should mean in the daily lives of the Jews. Because they believed that there was one God (as opposed to other religions, such as the Romans with their pantheon of gods), they ought to love the one true God with every part of their being. Jesus quoted from [Deuteronomy 6:5](#), "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength" (NIV). Matthew, Mark, and Luke add "with all your mind." Jesus' purpose was to show that a person's total being must be involved in loving God. Nothing must be held back because God holds nothing back. The rest of the New Testament follows Jesus' addition to [Deuteronomy 6:5](#) by strongly emphasizing the place of much spiritual growth as in the renewing of the mind ([Romans 12:2](#); [Ephesians 4:23](#)). We need Jesus' emphases every bit as much as this scribe who came to Jesus. Much of modern-day spirituality attempts to bypass the mind and replace it with "spirit" in spiritual growth. We need to take every thought captive for Christ ([2 Corinthians 10:5](#)).

The word for "love" is *agapao*, totally unselfish love, a love human beings are capable of only with the help of the Holy Spirit. God's Spirit helps us love him as we ought. God wants our warmhearted love and devotion, not just our obedience.

The *mind* was considered to be the center of a person's intellect, the *soul* was the person's "being" and uniqueness, the *heart* was the center of desires and affections, and the *strength* referred to physical capabilities.

Every man must be thought of as a neighbor, for evil must be committed toward no one.

St. Augustine

To love God in this way is to fulfill completely all the commandments regarding one's "vertical" relationship.

LIFE APPLICATION

ALL OF ME

Jesus taught that love for God involves every aspect of our being. As you consider your devotion to God, does he have all of you?

Your heart

- Is he the focus of your affections?
- Is your love for him warm and real?
- Do you take pleasure in his ultimate worth?

Your soul

- Are you willing to give him your life itself?
- Does your worship genuinely reflect your inner desires and intentions?
- Do you love him with your total being?

Your mind

- Does your commitment fully involve your intellectual capabilities?
- Is your faith fully informed or based on blind trust?
- Is your mind trained to think of his moral perfection?

Your strength

- Do you strive to love and serve him energetically?
- Have you devoted all your physical and material capabilities to him?
- Can you sustain intense love for him even under pressure or when doubts arise?

[12:31](#) "The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these."^{NIV} In addition to the law quoted in [12:30](#), there is a second and equally important law. This law focuses on "horizontal" relationships—our dealings with fellow human beings. A person cannot maintain a good "vertical" relationship with God (loving God) without also caring for his or her neighbor. For this second law, Jesus quoted [Leviticus 19:18](#): "Love your neighbor as yourself." The word "neighbor" refers to fellow human beings in general. The love a person has for himself or herself (in the sense of looking out for oneself, caring about best interests, etc.) should be continued, but it should also be directed toward others.

In answer to the man's question, Jesus explained that *there is no commandment greater than these*—loving God and loving others. The Ten Commandments and all the other Old Testament laws are summarized in these two laws. By fulfilling these two commands to love God totally and love others as oneself, a person will keep all the other commands.

LIFE APPLICATION

TWO SIMPLE PRINCIPLES

God's laws are not burdensome. They can be reduced to two simple principles: Love God and love others. These commands are from the Old Testament ([Deuteronomy 6:5](#); [Leviticus 19:18](#)). When you love God completely and care for others as you care for yourself, then you have fulfilled the intent of the Ten Commandments and the other Old Testament laws. According to Jesus, these

two commandments summarize all God's laws. Let them rule your thoughts, decisions, and actions. When you are uncertain about what to do, ask yourself which course of action best demonstrates love for God and love for others.

See Also:

[Chart: What Jesus Said About Love](#)

[12:32](#) Then the scribe said to him, "You are right, Teacher; you have truly said that 'he is one, and besides him there is no other.'"^{NRSV} The man had received his answer ([12:28](#)), and he commended Jesus for his true and insightful answer. The man realized that after all the Pharisees' wrangling about the laws, the answer had been amazingly simple. The man reaffirmed the Shema ([12:29](#)) quoted from Deuteronomy, saying *he is one* (rather than "God is one") because Jews characteristically omitted speaking the divine name unnecessarily out of great respect for it. He then added *besides him there is no other*, echoing [Deuteronomy 4:35](#) (see also [Exodus 8:10](#); [Isaiah 45:21](#)). Jesus' victory was complete; even his opponents recognized that he was right.

[12:33](#) "And to love Him with all the heart, with all the understanding, with all the soul, and with all the strength, and to love one's neighbor as oneself, is more than all the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices."^{NKJV} This man understood that the laws of love for God and love for neighbor were more important than *the whole burnt offerings and sacrifices*. In other words, love was more important than all the ritual and ceremonial laws. This man understood what the entire nation had been unable to understand from the time of the judges. God had told them many times, "To obey is better than sacrifice" ([1 Samuel 15:22](#) NRSV). The prophets Isaiah and Hosea repeated it ([Isaiah 1:11](#); [Hosea 6:6](#)). But still the religious leaders loved their rituals and their ceremonies, all the while missing God and looking down with loathing on the common people. In so doing, they had missed the point completely—they didn't love God or their neighbor. This man, one of the few among the Pharisees, was able to see that loving God with all one's heart, understanding (substituted for "mind"), soul, and strength, and to love one's neighbor revealed a level of love and obedience that went far beyond the offering of sacrifices. God doesn't want just our work for him (preaching, teaching, giving), he wants our heart.

EASY TO FORGET

This Pharisee reminds us to love God; how easily we forget to do so. We obey God, fear him, and ask him for help and forgiveness, but do we stop all our activities just to love him? Remember to love God for his absolute goodness and perfect holiness. Pause to thank him for his loving care for you. Praise him for the wonderful gifts he provides for you to use serving him and others. Appreciate his unsurpassed grace and long-lasting mercy toward you.

See Also:

[Chart: Sacrifices of the Heart](#)

[12:34](#) Now when Jesus saw that he answered wisely, He said to him, "You are not far from the kingdom of God."^{NKJV} Jesus was pleased by the man's response and told him that he was *not far from the kingdom of God*. This man had caught the intent of God's law as it is so often stressed in the Old Testament—that true obedience comes from the heart. Because the Old Testament commands lead to Christ, the man's next step toward obtaining God's kingdom was faith in Jesus himself. This, however, was the most difficult step to take.

But after that no one dared question Him.^{NKJV} Delegations of each group of Jewish leadership had come to Jesus with questions, and each had received a tough lesson from him. The last question, sincere in intent, taught the man, the crowd, and the other leaders that even those who got past the rituals and ceremonies to an understanding of obedience to God still did not have the kingdom; they were "not far" from it, but they did not have it. The final truth to be grasped was that God's kingdom is obtained through faith in Jesus Christ as God's Son. Perhaps after Jesus' death and resurrection, this understanding Pharisee also became a believer.

In any case, this was unconditional surrender; the religious leaders gave up trying to catch Jesus in his words ([12:34](#)). Obviously their efforts had been fruitless, and it was *they* who had ended up looking foolish. They would have to resort to other plans in order to kill Jesus.

SO CLOSE AND SO FAR

We do not know if this Pharisee ever became a true believer. But we must remember that being "close" to being a Christian is infinitely far if a person never commits to Christ. Our salvation cannot rest on intellectual knowledge alone. We must repent, follow Christ, and be made new creatures by his Holy Spirit. Don't be content with being close; take the step, make the commitment.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Mark.

Commentary Matthew 6:24

[6:24](#) "No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth."^{NRSV} Continuing the theme of his disciples having undivided loyalty, Jesus explained that *no one can serve* (that is, be a slave of, belong to) *two masters*. A slave could belong to two partners but not to two separate individuals because his or her loyalty would be divided. While slaves have their earthly master chosen for them, from a spiritual standpoint all people must choose whom they will serve. They can choose to serve themselves—to pursue *wealth* and selfish pleasures—or they can choose to serve *God*. The word translated "wealth" is also translated "mammon," referring to possessions as well. Either we store our treasures with God ([6:20-21](#)), we focus our "eyes" on him ([6:22-23](#)), and we serve him alone—or else we do not serve him at all. There can be no part-time loyalty. Jesus wants total devotion.

LIFE APPLICATION

WHO'S YOUR MASTER?

Jesus says we can have only one master. We live in a materialistic society where many people serve money. They spend all their lives collecting and storing it, only to die and leave it behind. Their desire for money and what it can buy far outweighs their commitment to God and spiritual matters. Even Christians spend a great deal of time trying to create heaven on earth. Whatever you store up, you will spend much of your time and energy thinking about. Don't fall into the materialistic trap, because "the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil" ([1 Timothy 6:10](#)). Does Christ or money occupy more of your thoughts, time, and efforts? Ask yourself, "Have I taken

Christ or financial security as my master?"

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Matthew.

Life-Sharing Lesson 3 “ Insanity For Christ: What’s The Cost” Mark 12:28-34, Matthew 6:24

1. When was a time when you did not give yourself 100% to something and regretted it later?

I once ran in a track meet and only finished 3 ½ laps in a 4 lap race. I was next to last in the race and was too embarrassed to finish the race. When my friend who was behind me in the race finished the race. I admired him for his courage to finish last in the face of ridicule, whereas I had taken a cheaper way out. I didn't give 100%. I don't remember my friend's name, but I still see the image of him finishing the race.

The Greatest Commandment Mark 12: 28-34

²⁸ One of the teachers of the law came and heard them debating. Noticing that Jesus had given them a good answer, he asked him, “Of all the commandments, which is the most important?”

²⁹ “The most important one,” answered Jesus, “is this: ‘Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one.’^[e] ³⁰ Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.’^[f] ³¹ The second is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’^[g] There is no commandment greater than these.”

³² “Well said, teacher,” the man replied. “You are right in saying that God is one and there is no other but him. ³³ To love him with all your heart, with all your understanding and with all your strength, and to love your neighbor as yourself is more important than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

³⁴ When Jesus saw that he had answered wisely, he said to him, “You are not far from the kingdom of God.” And from then on no one dared ask him any more questions.

2. What picture comes to your mind when you think of someone who loves the Lord with all their heart, soul, mind and strength?

I think of a person of compassion who is ready to pray for anything at the mention of a need. I think of a person who will not hesitate to go where he/she feels God is leading without thinking of his/her own well being or comfort level. I think of a person who is a person who has done a lot for the Lord, and sometimes only seen some small results, but the person is just as committed to Christ as if there had been an abundant harvest.

3. What kind of behaviors would we be doing that others would consider insane if we were to love our neighbors as ourselves?

We would actually use our savings in our account to pay a car payment or house mortgage for someone who may be sick or has lost their job. We would actually volunteer to look after their kids to give them a break. We would go and cook meals for those who are ill. We would stand by the side of those who are being picked up or made fun of at school or work. We would sometimes donate new items and keep the old ones for ourselves. We would use our vacation money to send someone on a vacation who never could afford one. We would choose to get out of the rat race to continually upgrade, and to us those upgrade funds to do what Jesus told us to do about feeding, clothing, sheltering, and visiting those in need.

4. At a store if an item costs \$2.53, we pay \$2.53, but if God says its \$2.53 why do we try to get away with paying \$1.35.

We continuously fall back on the idea that God knows our hearts. We try to tell ourselves that the amount of something is not important as long as the Lord knows our hearts. We send our hearts in one direction and our money in a different direction. We are always willing to give the Lord more than we have, than we are to give him a portion of what we do have.

5. When it comes to giving our lives to God, the real issue is” how much of our lives are we going to keep for ourselves?” What do you think is at the heart of our holding back on God?

We don't really trust God to provide for our needs. We do not believe that God will honor our faithfulness with our giving. We would rather get the things we want for ourselves right now rather than waiting on God.

6. Why does the commandment require all of our heart in loving God, instead of just requiring the largest portion of our heart? How do you define “love” in this passage of loving God with all your heart.

God tells us that when it comes to our devotion, He will not share his place with another. Our commitment to God is to be a total one. Love in this passage means saying yes to God in each and every situation regardless of whether we like the request or not. Love is demonstrated in our obedience. Our obedience is rooted in believing that God knows what is best for our situation in every given moment. Jesus say this in John 14: ¹⁵ “If you love me, keep my commands. ¹⁵ “If you love me, keep my commands.

7. What is it that makes it difficult about trying to love your neighbor? How do you define the word “love” in this passage of loving your neighbor as yourself?

True love is going to cost us money, time and resources. Think of the cost of the good Samaritan when trying to be someone's neighbor. Love in this passage means an eager willingness to share what you have to help out someone else. It goes beyond simply giving out a small handout every once in a while.

8. How do you know when you have enough stuff to take care of yourself?

Every person has to make a choice on how much of the world resources he/she is going to consume on him/herself. Until we learn to recognize we have enough, we will never feel what it is to be rich. Being rich is not measured in terms of dollars, but rather in terms of contentment. Most people try to keep living slightly above their income. If you decide to live several steps below your income, you will have more money than you need and will actually be happy with what you have.

9. Why does accumulating stuff, challenge our ability to love God and to love our neighbor?

The temptation is to put our trust and our future in our ability to accumulate things. The more things or wealth we have, the more secure we think our future is going to be. Nothing could be further from the truth. When our trust is in our possessions, we are not free to love God, because our possessions will determine the steps we will and will not take. We are not free to love our neighbors, because we will constantly be in fear of not having enough to take care of our needs in the future if we love our neighbors too much today.

10. When does the accumulation of wealth, become a form of insanity?

When we think our wealth can secure us happiness or security, it is a form of insanity. We will be working hard to accumulate more and more without seeing

clearly what its costing us in terms of serving God and loving each other. There are people with 10 million dollars who do not believe they have enough money for retirement. The more wealth we have, the more likely we are to waste it on frivolous items. We will begin to think that we deserve to be pampered by the finer things of life.

Matthew 6:24 ²⁴ “No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.

11. Why didn't Jesus say that you cannot serve both God and the devil, but instead said you cannot serve God and money?

Jesus knew that once we understood who He was, we would have no desire to serve the devil. The real competitor for where we would put our trust is in money. Money gives us the illusion of being in control of our future. It can become an addiction in our lives in which we feel we have to get more. Our getting more and trusting in, makes us unavailable for service to God. We may give lip service to God, but our hearts will be far away.

12. Is it true, the more money you have, the more money you waste? Why or why not.

Yes. We will take items that work perfectly well and get rid of them in order to upgrade to the latest model. We will listen to advertisers convince us to buy things right now, that up until this point, we were perfectly content not having in our lives. We will take raises that we get and immediately upgrade our lifestyles, and instead of using the raise to end our debt, we will increase our debt load. We will redefine what we need in terms of a new lifestyle that we can afford rather than being able to keep things simple in life. So much money is spent on trying to impress other people, that what we actually need becomes secondary in considering our purchases. We all know John 3:16-18 but we don't consider 1 John 3:16-18 ¹⁶ This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. ¹⁷ If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can

the love of God be in that person? ¹⁸ *Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*

13. When it comes to giving, we often think of how large of a percentage we give, but God looks at how large of an amount we choose to keep. When our income goes up, should the percentage we give also go up? Why or why not

Jesus commended the widow for giving all that she had to live on. We often set out the tithe of 10% as the goal for us to reach and sometimes as the ceiling for us to be proud of in the church. But if we did increase our percentage as our income went up, it would keep us from constantly upgrading our lives and from the seduction of materialism. Once you've reach 10% you may give more to the church's ministries or, you may use that extra to bless people directly with your giving. You may support other ministries or organizations that are doing things that capture your heart. You may start your own ministry outreach to bless others.

14. Did you feel out a pledge sheet? Were you honest in how much of yourself you were giving to God?

15. Are you on track with your devotions?

15b. Do you have a testimony from your button—

15. Remember Come dressed next week like a fanatic for Christ. (Could your group come up with a strategy for dressing or doing something together on Sunday??? As fanatics for Christ)

Life-Sharing Lesson 4 “Insanity For Christ: Fanatic Or Fair Weather Fan”

John 6:25-71,

COMMENTARY

JESUS IS THE TRUE BREAD FROM HEAVEN / [6:22-40](#) / [99](#)

The interaction occurring between Jesus and the crowd in Capernaum was strikingly similar to his conversation with the Samaritan woman at the well outside Sychar. To the Samaritan, Jesus introduced himself as the source of living water; to the crowd he identified himself as the living bread. As he had done before, Jesus used the immediate context of the miracle of the loaves and fish to point to his concern over the eternal welfare of his hearers.

As long as Jesus used his power to meet the felt needs of the crowd, they were happy to follow. They even made plans to crown him king. What better social program could be possible than miraculously feeding people every day! But that was not Jesus' purpose. The crowd quickly displayed their real allegiance by rejecting Jesus as soon as he would not do what they wanted.

[6:22-25](#) To understand the action in these verses, we must back up and trace the movements of all the characters. Jesus performed the miracle of feeding the five thousand somewhere on the eastern shore of the Sea of Galilee ([6:1](#)). That evening, his disciples boarded a boat headed west toward Capernaum ([6:17](#)) without Jesus, who had gone up into a mountain to be alone ([6:15](#)). Then Jesus came to the disciples during the storm ([6:21](#)). So Jesus and the disciples arrived together at Capernaum (presumably before dawn).

Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.^{NIV} On the opposite shore, the crowd that had seen the disciples leave knew that Jesus hadn't gone with them and that the disciples had taken the only boat. The next morning they discovered that Jesus was gone, but they knew that he had not gone with the disciples. They assumed that he must have left to join his disciples. At some point during the day several boats arrived from Tiberias. Though it is not stated, the implication is that the crowd may have heard of Jesus' whereabouts from someone on the boats. So people from the crowd used those boats, which were probably going to head back across the sea toward Tiberias anyway, to cross to Capernaum to search for Jesus.

[6:26-29](#) **"Very truly, I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves."**^{NRSV} The crowd, being satisfied once by what Jesus had done for them, wanted to see what else Jesus

could do for them (maybe he'd provide more free meals?). But they did not realize what the miracle actually revealed to them. Even though they realized that perhaps Jesus was the Prophet (see [6:14](#)), they were going to try to make him king. Jesus refused to encourage them in their desire for the material satisfaction he could provide.

His beginning response in effect was, "You were so intent on the loaves themselves that you haven't yet seen who made them." The people may not have known it, but their needs went much deeper. Jesus' signs were given to reveal that he could meet those deeper needs.

It is good to be weary and frustrated with the fruitless search for the good, so that one can reach out one's arms instead to the Redeemer.

Blaise Pascal

Thus, Jesus told them: **"Do not work for the food that perishes."**^{NRSV} The bread that fills the stomach, whether produced by a miraculous sign or made at the bakery, is not spiritual or eternal. But there is another kind of food, **"food that endures for eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you."**^{NRSV} Jesus was saying that the people should not be following him because he provided free bread, but because he provides spiritual "bread"—bread that can give them eternal life.

Jesus wanted the people to look to him as the one who could provide the food that endures to eternal life. He himself is that food. By coming to him and receiving him by faith they would partake of the Bread of Life. This offer is the same as the offer of living water to the Samaritan woman in [chapter 4](#). Eternal life is a gift; it cannot be earned, so Jesus said, "Do not work for it." The only work to be done is to believe in Jesus.

"On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval."^{NIV} In those days a *seal* was a mark of ownership and authenticity. The Son belonged to his Father; furthermore, Jesus was the authentic Son of God—the giver of eternal life. The Father's seal of approval was on him alone.

Then they asked him, "What must we do to do the works God requires?"^{NIV} The crowd missed Jesus' words about how he would *give* the food that lasts for eternal life. Instead they focused on his words about working, wanting to know what they could do to carry out the works of God.

Jesus gave a straightforward answer: **"This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."**^{NKJV} The only "work" God requires from us is to believe in his Son. But for some reason, we feel better somehow "earning" God's favor rather than accepting it as a gift. But the *work* of trusting Christ is not by works, but by faith!

LIFE APPLICATION

THE WORK OF GOD

Many who sincerely seek God wonder what he wants them to do. The religions of the world have many answers to this question, but Jesus' reply was brief and simple: Believe in him whom God has sent. Satisfying God does not come from the work we *do*, but from whom we *believe*. What does it mean to *believe*? The first step is accepting Jesus' claim to be the Son of God. We declare in prayer to Jesus, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" ([Matthew 16:16](#) NKJV). Accepting Jesus means giving him control of every area of life. To believe means to yield our wills, our desires, our plans, our strengths and weaknesses to Christ's direction and safekeeping. It means moment-by-moment obedience. Believing is a relationship with the one who promises to live within, trusting him to guide and direct us to do his will.

[6:30-31](#) Amazingly, the crowd then asked Jesus, "**What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?**"^{NIV} The crowd had just seen the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, but they wanted more—not just one day's supply of bread, but a guarantee of continuous supply. Their argument was that their **ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness**^{NRSV}—which, of course, was available every day for nearly forty years. And they cited their Scriptures, quoting from such verses as [Exodus 16:4](#) and [Psalm 78:24-25](#)— "**He gave them bread from heaven to eat.**"^{NKJV} A midrash (Jewish commentary) on [Exodus 16:4](#) says that just as the former redeemer (Moses) caused manna to descend from heaven, so also the latter Redeemer will cause manna to descend. They expected this from Jesus if he was the Messiah.

[6:32](#) "**It was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.**"^{NRSV} Moses hadn't performed the miracle, God had. And the God who gave the manna to the Israelites for forty years now gives the true bread out of heaven—Jesus. Just as the Israelites ate manna every day, so God provides the true bread for daily sustenance.

LIFE APPLICATION

WHO IS THE SOURCE?

The Jews wanted to give Moses the credit for what God had done. Can the same kind of misunderstanding creep into our own thinking? For instance, when we speak about prayer, do we tend to take part of the credit for the work that God actually accomplishes? We hear statements such as, "She was sick, and we prayed and she was healed," or "The storm was approaching, but I prayed and it went around us." Our phrases may imply that the power was in the prayers rather than in God who hears and answers prayer. Prayer allows us to participate in God's work. We dare not get so involved in our experience of prayer that we neglect the source of our power. When prayers are answered, our attention must be on who answered rather than on who prayed.

6:33-35 "For the bread of God is He who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world."^{NKJV} The Jews wanted a daily supply of physical bread. God had given them his Son as the true heavenly bread to meet their daily spiritual needs. The present tense indicates the continual supply.

Unable to grasp that Jesus spoke about himself as the Bread of Life, the crowd said, **"From now on give us this bread."**^{NIV} Like the woman at the well who asked Jesus to give her the living water so she wouldn't be thirsty again and would never have to make any more long trips to the well, this crowd wanted what Jesus could give so their lives could be made easier. They missed the point. So Jesus told them directly,

"I am the bread of life."^{NKJV} If people wanted this bread, they must come to Jesus and believe in him. When Jesus used the words "I am," he was pointing to his unique, divine identity. In essence this statement says, "I the Lord God am here to provide you with everything you need for your spiritual life."

Each of the "I am" statements ([see chart](#)) represent a particular aspect of this provision. For Jesus to say he is the Bread of Life is for him to say, "I am the sustenance of your life."

"I am the bread of life"—here is at the same time one of the greatest claims and one of the greatest offers of Jesus Christ.

William Barclay

"He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."^{NKJV} Just as bread supplies our bodies with strength and nourishment, Jesus, the true bread from heaven, had come to strengthen and nourish his people—to change their lives, to bring spiritual and eternal life to all who would believe in him!

LIFE APPLICATION

REAL SATISFACTION

Jesus offers the ultimate spiritual satisfaction: If we believe in him, we will never hunger or thirst. But we have heard the gospel wrong if we think Jesus offers an escape from life and its problems. Thousands of Christians still face physical hunger, and millions face crushing difficulties. The gospel frees us to face life. In the middle of the world's pessimism and despair, the gospel unflinchingly claims that Jesus offers infinitely more than this life can give. We will be disappointed if we expect the presence of Jesus in us to mean that we are immune to sin, struggles, and failures. There are many ways to know hunger and thirst, and we will undoubtedly experience many of them. One of Jesus' last statements was, "In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!" ([16:33](#) NRSV).

[6:36](#) "You have seen me and still you do not believe."^{NIV} According to this reading (which is found in some manuscripts), this emphasizes that the crowds had seen *Jesus*, the very Bread of Life, standing before them, and yet they did not believe in him. Other manuscripts read, "You have seen and still you do not believe." This emphasizes that the crowds had seen the miracles Jesus did and still they did not believe. They had not only seen but eaten the multiplied bread and fish, but they resisted the necessary conclusion that he was divine.

Luke records Jesus telling the story of a poor man named Lazarus and how he begged for food outside the gate of a wealthy man's house ([Luke 16:19-31](#)). Lazarus's eternal reward was the company of Abraham, while the rich man found himself in hell. Eventually the rich man begged Abraham to send Lazarus back to warn his loved ones of their imminent fate. Abraham replied, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" ([Luke 16:31](#) NIV). Jesus told the story to teach that miracles cannot overcome hardness of heart. Jesus offered plenty of evidence for those willing to believe.

[6:37](#) "All that the Father gives Me will come to Me."^{NKJV} In the Greek, the words *all that* are neuter singular, indicating the total body of believers for all time. The Father gives this collective group to the Son (see also [17:2](#), [24](#)). Only those selected by God can come to the Son and believe in him. God's Spirit enables them to come. All those who have been invited to come to Jesus and have done so can rest assured that God was at work in their lives.

"The one who comes to Me I will by no means cast out."^{NKJV} While the first part of this verse speaks of the collective group of believers, this second part speaks

about the individual. God's Word assures us that Jesus will always welcome the sincere seeker, and the seeker who comes to believe will never be rejected ([10:28-29](#)).

LIFE APPLICATION

OUR PLACE IN THE PLAN

The Father gives, the Son preserves, and we come. God's foreknowledge is a part of his character that we must accept though we do not fully understand. We must ask ourselves: Am I one of those who has come to Christ? Whether or not we are among those whom the Father has given to the Son, or whether we are secure in Christ's protection, depends on how we answered the first question—have we come? When we come to Jesus, we find great assurance in his promise that we will never be rejected.

[6:38](#) "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me."^{NKJV} Jesus did not work independently of God the Father, but in union with him. This should give us even more assurance of being welcomed into God's presence and being protected by him. All who respond positively to God's call can be assured of his protection (see [17:11](#)). The protection covers them in this life and for eternity. Our spiritual hunger and thirst are satisfied in this life, and we know in the future that we will be raised from the dead to live with Jesus forever. Yet the guarantee does not apply to superficial attachment. We must follow him wholeheartedly and commit our lives to him.

[6:39](#) "And this is the will of him who sent me, that I should lose nothing of all that he has given me."^{NRSV} As in [verse 37](#), the Greek words for *all that* are neuter singular; they indicate the total collective entity of all believers. All those who are among this group of believers can be assured of God's promise of eternal life. Christ will not let his people be overcome by Satan. However, this commitment must not be superficial, as was the "commitment" of those disciples who turned away (see [6:66](#)).

[6:40](#) "All who see the Son and believe in him may have eternal life; and I will raise them up on the last day."^{NRSV} While the NRSV translators chose *them* for the final phrase to indicate all believers (though the Greek word is *auton*, meaning "him"), the NIV preserves *him* because Jesus was emphasizing personal response and individual belief. The same pattern appears as in [verse 37](#), which goes from the collective entity of believers to the individual believer. God values each person.

Jesus demonstrated how valuable we are by his teaching: God sent the Son to earth; the Son came to earth; the Son promised to both preserve and to resurrect the ones he received from the Father.

THE JEWS DISAGREE THAT JESUS IS FROM HEAVEN / [6:41-59](#) / [100](#)

Many of the crowd in Capernaum that day could not believe their ears. They knew this man's family, yet he claimed to be the Son of God. To them, Jesus' delusion seemed obvious. In their minds, Jesus was a local product with interesting powers and unusual authority, but was audacious when it came to speaking about himself. Jesus responded with uncompromising directness. He required then, as he requires now, an unconditional acceptance of his lordship. Any attempt to soften his claim amounts to rejection of his central message.

[6:41-43](#) Then the Jews began to complain about him.^{NRSV} When John says *Jews*, he is referring to the Jewish leaders who were hostile to Jesus, not to Jews in general. John himself was a Jew, and so was Jesus. The Jews in Jesus' audience hardly heard a word he said about selection, protection, and resurrection, for they were offended by his claim to be the bread that came down from heaven.

"I am the bread that came down from heaven."^{NRSV} They said to one another, **"Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, 'I have come down from heaven'?"**^{NRSV} What they concluded was logical: "If we know this man's parents, how can he be from heaven?" But they *didn't* know Jesus' parentage. They missed what their own Scriptures had prophesied in [Isaiah 7:14](#), "Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel" (NKJV).

Jesus had moved from Nazareth to Capernaum at the beginning of his ministry (see [Matthew 4:13](#); [Mark 1:21](#); [John 2:12](#)). Most likely, his parents and siblings had gone with him. The Jews in Capernaum knew Jesus' parents, and therefore they thought they knew who Jesus was—the son of Joseph.

"Do not complain among yourselves."^{NIV} Jesus told the people to stop grumbling and complaining among themselves. Not one of them could know his true identity if the Father had not revealed it to him. Jesus relied on this revelation.

LIFE APPLICATION

EXCUSE OR REASON

If we listen carefully, we will hear people admiring Jesus in some way while refusing to submit to him. They might say, "He's a great teacher, but I don't believe he's God." Some so-called Christians or a respected leader or minister may have let them down or even abused them in some way. Perhaps a parent modeled a contradictory message of religious superficiality alongside violent behavior. Pain creates very real obstacles. We must not deny the pain in ourselves or in others, but pain and disappointment must not keep people from Jesus. Beyond whatever obstacles come between us and Jesus, we must honestly ask, Is what happened an excuse to reject Jesus or a reason to run to him?

6:44-45 "No one can come to me unless drawn by the Father who sent me; and I will raise that person up on the last day. It is written in the prophets, 'And they shall all be taught by God.' Everyone who has heard and learned from the Father comes to me."^{NRSV} A person cannot come to Jesus if he has not been drawn by the Father, taught by the Father, heard from the Father, and learned from the Father. God, not the person, plays the most active role in salvation. When someone chooses to believe in Jesus Christ as Savior, he or she does so only in response to the urging of God's Holy Spirit. Thus no one can believe in Jesus without God's help. If a person comes, the Father has drawn him or her.

When Jesus quoted from the prophets saying, "*They shall all be taught by God,*" he was alluding to an Old Testament view of the messianic kingdom where all people would be taught directly by God ([Isaiah 54:13](#); [Jeremiah 31:31-34](#)). He was stressing the importance of not merely hearing, but learning. We are taught by God through the Bible, our experiences, the thoughts the Holy Spirit brings, and relationships with other Christians. Are you open to God's teaching?

6:46 "No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father."^{NIV} Jesus' previous statement about people being taught by God (and listening to and learning from the Father) does not mean that any mortal could actually see God the Father. *Only* Jesus has come from God's presence, and *only he* has seen the Father. This last statement in itself implies divine privileges—for no man has ever seen God (see [1:18](#); [1 Timothy 6:15-16](#)).

6:47 "Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life."^{NKJV} Jesus makes it plain that the believer has eternal life, starting now. *Believes* in these verses means "continues to believe." We do not believe merely once; we keep on believing in and trusting Jesus.

[6:48](#) "I am the bread of life."^{NKJV} This is one of Jesus' remarkable "I am" declarations (see the chart link below). No one else but Jesus is the Bread that gives eternal life.

[6:49-50](#) "Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, and they died. This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die."^{NRSV} The religious leaders frequently asked Jesus to prove to them why he was better than the prophets they already had. Earlier in this chapter ([6:30-31](#)), they had used Moses and the supply of manna in the wilderness as a standard for measuring Jesus. Jesus refused their challenge. *Manna* was a physical and temporal bread. The people ate it and were sustained for a day. But they had to get more bread every day, and this bread could not keep them from dying.

Without demeaning Moses' role, Jesus was presenting himself as the spiritual bread from heaven that satisfies completely and leads to eternal life. Again, the personal effectiveness of this Bread comes not from seeing it or from recognizing its heavenly origin, but from taking it in—eating it.

[6:51](#) "The bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh."^{NRSV} To *give* of his *flesh* meant Jesus gave over his body to death on the cross, so that by his death the world could have life. To eat the living bread means to accept Christ into our lives and become united with him. We are united with Christ in two ways: (1) by believing in his death (the sacrifice of his flesh) and resurrection and (2) by devoting ourselves each day to living as he requires, depending on his teaching for guidance, and trusting in the Holy Spirit for power. Just as the Jews depended on bread for daily strength and relished it as a main part of their diet, so we should depend on and desire the living Christ in our daily lives.

[6:52-53](#) "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you."^{NIV} Instead of directly telling them how he could give them his flesh to eat ([6:52](#)), Jesus reemphasized the necessity of eating his flesh and—he here added—also drinking his blood. No one could receive his life until the giver died by shedding his own life's *blood*. Thus, Jesus wants us to accept, receive, even assimilate the significance of his death in order to receive eternal life. Christians do this frequently when they commemorate the Lord's Supper and take to heart Jesus' words, "Take, eat, this is my body . . . drink from it, all of you; for this is my blood of the covenant" ([Matthew 26:26-28](#) NRSV). But Christians should not limit this to only the celebration of the Lord's Supper (or Eucharist); Christians can partake of Jesus anytime.

[6:54-55](#) "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood have eternal life, and I will raise them up on the last day."^{NRSV} The person who feeds on Jesus' flesh

(said to be the **true food**,^{NRSV} and drinks his blood (said to be **true drink**,^{NRSV} is one who accepts by faith Jesus' sacrificial death and thereby receives eternal life.

6:56 "Those who eat my flesh and drink my blood abide in me, and I in them."^{NRSV} This is the first mention in this Gospel of "mutual indwelling" (that is, a simultaneous indwelling of two persons in each other, also known as "coinherence"). When we receive Jesus, he lives in us and we live in him.

6:57 "Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me."^{NIV} Here Jesus pointed to his relationship with the Father as a model of the vital union he would share with each believer. As the Son depends upon the living Father for his life and lives *because of* the Father, so the believer who feeds on Jesus will live *because of* Jesus.

6:58 "This is the bread that came down from heaven, not like that which your ancestors ate, and they died. But the one who eats this bread will live forever."^{NRSV} This verse summarizes the discourse and repeats the major points of Jesus' message. He again contrasted himself as the Bread that gives life with the manna that could not give eternal life to those Israelites who ate it.

6:59 He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.^{NIV} The Greek expression underlying *in the synagogue* is literally "in synagogue." The absence of the article in the Greek may indicate a gathering, not necessarily in the synagogue.

MANY DISCIPLES DESERT JESUS / [6:60-71](#) / [101](#)

Those listening to Jesus were experiencing a crisis in their determination to follow him. Many of his actions thus far had been attractive, though sometimes curious. But all this talk of consuming his body and blood was difficult to stomach. Jesus' claims forced his followers to examine their real motives and the depth of their commitment.

John made it clear that the problem of acceptance was among the disciples, not the Jewish leaders. He was warning later disciples against being superficial or shallow followers. At times the way may become difficult and confusing. When that happens, will we persevere or fall by the way?

6:60 When many of his disciples heard it, they said, "This teaching is difficult; who can accept it?"^{NRSV}

At this time in Jesus' ministry, he had several followers who could loosely be called *his disciples* (see [4:1](#)). These "disciples" were not the Twelve, and many of them would not

The Christian ideal has not been tried and found wanting. It has been found difficult, and left untried.

G. K. Chesterton

receive his message.

LIFE APPLICATION

HARSH WORDS

The motive behind Jesus' harsh words is not difficult to see—he wanted people to count the cost of following him ([Luke 14:25-33](#)). His words shocked and challenged. They were not comfortable half-truths, but hard-edged truth. Those who follow Jesus in hopes of feeling good always will be disappointed sooner or later. Only those who find in Jesus the rock-solid truth will be able to weather the difficulties of living in this fallen world. If our central motive for following Jesus isn't because he is *the Truth*, we too will be disappointed.

6:61 Jesus, knowing that his listeners were struggling, asked, "**Does this offend you?**"^{NKJV}, or more literally, "Does this cause you to stumble?" (The Greek word *skandalizo* means

"to ensnare, to trap, to cause to stumble"; it is often used in the New Testament to indicate a falling away into unbelief. See, for example, [Matthew 13:21](#); [24:10](#); [Mark 6:3](#); [Romans 14:20-21](#).)

You may start out with Christ in the school of discipleship, but as the courses get harder, will you drop out?

Bruce B. Barton

Earlier, in answering questions that John the Baptist had asked through messengers, Jesus made this pointed remark, "And blessed is he who keeps from stumbling over me" ([Matthew 11:6](#) NASB). Jesus was keenly aware that those not ready to respond fully to him would stumble over him or be offended by him. Remember that it is possible to be offensive in the way we communicate the gospel, for which we would be at fault. But if we present Jesus lovingly and honestly, we must neither be shocked nor feel guilty if the Good News offends someone.

6:62 "**Then what if you were to see the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?**"^{NRSV} They didn't believe that Jesus came down from heaven. If they saw him return and go back up to heaven, would they then believe? According to

[verse 65](#), they would not, for they were not true believers. Jesus had been purposely harsh so as to separate the true believers from those who were accompanying him for the wrong reasons. Some sought a new political party; others thought Jesus might lead a revolt against Rome; still others were simply fascinated with theological discussions. All of these thoughts were potential starting points of interest in Jesus, but they were not enough to make people real disciples.

6:63 "The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you are spirit and they are life."^{NIV} This statement gives us the key to interpreting Jesus' discourse. His hearers had not understood the spiritual intent of his message.

Some of them may have taken Jesus' words about eating his flesh literally; thus, Jesus' clarification, *the flesh counts for nothing*. This statement also applies to the correct mode of interpretation: A fleshly interpretation of his words would yield nothing; one must apply a spiritual interpretation to Spirit-inspired words.

A woodenly literal, flesh-dominated manner of looking at Jesus' words will not yield the correct interpretation. That is granted only to the spiritual man, the Spirit-dominated man.

Leon Morris

Jesus had used similar terms in defining the new birth to Nicodemus, "Flesh gives birth to flesh, but the Spirit gives birth to spirit" ([3:6](#)), making the point in both places that effort that begins with the desires and objectives of human wisdom cannot arrive at the kind of life that the "Spirit gives." Jesus' very words are spirit (pneuma) and life (zoe); therefore, we must depend on the life-giving Spirit to appropriate Jesus' words. Peter was one such believer who came to realize that Jesus had the words of eternal life (see [6:68](#)).

6:64 "But among you there are some who do not believe." For Jesus knew from the first who were the ones that did not believe.^{NRSV} From the beginning of his ministry Jesus knew that some of the ones following him were not believers in his true identity as the Son of God come from heaven.

Jesus also knew from the first **the one that would betray him.**^{NRSV} This was Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot ([6:70](#)). For a moment, John interrupts with a brief word of explanation for his original readers and us. Jesus included Judas in every facet of his ministry, knowing all the time that he would not respond to the living truth. Jesus' treatment of Judas was consistent with his own character, rather than according to what Judas deserved for his unwillingness to believe.

6:65 "For this reason I have told you that no one can come to me unless it is granted by the Father."^{NRSV} This repeats (hence the imperfect tense, "was saying") what Jesus had declared before (see [6:44-45](#)). The signs in themselves, no matter how remarkable, are not completely convincing. Some believe through seeing and others believe though not seeing, but all require God's assistance ([20:29](#)).

6:66 From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him.^{NIV} Several followers decided to not follow anymore. Within sight of the kingdom of heaven, privileged with a taste of the Bread of Life, and watching the living water flow, they nevertheless walked away. In a short sentence, John captured one of the saddest moments in the ministry of Jesus.

LIFE APPLICATION

TEMPTED TO TURN

Why did Jesus' words cause many of his followers to desert him?

- | They may have realized that he wasn't going to be the conquering Messiah-King they expected.
- | He refused to give in to their self-centered requests.
- | He emphasized faith, not deeds.
- | His teachings were difficult to accept, and some of his words were offensive.

As we grow in our faith, we may be tempted to turn away because Jesus' lessons are difficult. When discouragement, doubt, or confusion set in, will our response be to give up, ignore certain teachings, or reject Christ? Instead, we must consistently ask God to show us what the teachings mean and how they apply to our lives. We must then have the courage to act on God's truth.

6:67 Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?"^{NKJV} According to the Greek, this question expects a negative answer. Jesus knew their weaknesses and how little they really understood. He knew that one of them would not only go away, but betray him also. Yet he also knew that God had chosen eleven to believe in him.

We can't stay on middle ground about Jesus. When he asked the disciples if they would also leave, he was showing them that he was not taking their faith for granted. Jesus never tried to repel people with his teachings. He simply told the

truth. The more the people heard Jesus' real message, the more they divided into two camps—the honest seekers wanting to understand more, and those rejecting Jesus because they didn't like what they heard.

6:68 Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life."^{NKJV} After many of Jesus' followers had deserted him, he asked the twelve disciples if they also would leave. Peter replied, "*To whom shall we go?*" In his straightforward way, Peter answered for all of us—there is no other way. Though there are many philosophies and self-styled authorities, Jesus alone has the words of eternal life. People look everywhere for eternal life and miss Christ, the only source. There is nowhere else to go. The true disciples had found the only one who spoke the words that give eternal life.

LIFE APPLICATION

THE SOURCE

Peter's declaration was a statement of faith, not a claim of complete understanding. He was convinced that when Jesus spoke, the truth about eternal life flowed in his words. Peter wanted what Jesus had to give. His simple affirmation presents us with two challenges:

1. Do we (or those people we would like to reach) really desire eternal life? For many, eternity is an unattractive subject. Life is going so well. Death and disease are usually distant and unreal. Relationships, pleasures, and possessions are too cherished to even think about forsaking. The fact that we will be dead infinitely longer than we have lived is denied for as long as possible.
2. Are we holding out for eternal life through another way? Some people avoid thinking about eternal life by denying its existence outright. In fact, many religious systems do not have a concept of eternal life. Those that do, make the requirements unclear or beyond attainment.

Jesus' words are the only source of eternal life: "I am the bread of life. . . . If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever" ([6:48](#), [51](#), NIV).

6:69 "We believe and know that you are the Holy One of God."^{NIV} Peter's declaration parallels the one he made at Caesarea Philippi, but each of the synoptic Gospels gives a slightly different version of Peter's words (see [Matthew 16:16](#); [Mark 8:29](#); [Luke 9:20](#)). Peter was actually saying more than he knew. The

descriptive words he blurted out to tell Jesus how he and the other disciples felt about him conveys both Peter's impulsive nature and his genuine impression of Christ. First, he called Jesus "Lord" ([6:68](#)). To this he added: (1) there's no one else like you; (2) you have the truth about eternal life; (3) we have believed; (4) we know that you are *the Holy One of God*. Peter was doing the best he could to describe Jesus in a category separate from anyone else who ever lived.

Like Peter's, our own understanding of Jesus must expand as we live for him. When we first believe in Jesus as Savior and Lord, our understanding will be real but limited. But as time passes, our awareness of the breadth and depth of Jesus' saving work and his lordship ought to grow.

[6:70-71](#) Jesus answered them, "Did I not choose you, the twelve, and one of you is a devil?" He spoke of Judas Iscariot, the son of Simon, for it was he who would betray Him.^{NKJV} Peter may have thought he was speaking for the Twelve, but not so. One among them—Judas Iscariot—was a *devil*, the traitor who would betray Jesus. According to [13:2](#) and [13:27](#), Satan put the idea into Judas's heart to betray Jesus and then entered Judas to instigate the actual betrayal. Diabolos ([6:70](#)) means "slandorous, devilish," and having Satan's nature and qualities. Judas gave in to evil thinking and came under the control of the devil.

John reminded his first readers about what was at stake. Almost every word of teaching uttered by Jesus was given in the context of intense spiritual drama. Heaven must have held its breath as humans tried to figure out Jesus' true identity.

LIFE APPLICATION

HOW WILL YOU RESPOND?

In response to Jesus' message, some people left; others stayed and truly believed; and some, like Judas, stayed but tried to use Jesus for personal gain. Many people today turn away from Christ when they discern his real message. Others pretend to follow, going to church for status, approval of family and friends, or business contacts. We have only two choices for responding to Jesus—we either accept him or reject him. Have you accepted or rejected Christ?

Life-Sharing Lesson 4 “Insanity For Christ: Fanatic Or Fair Weather Fan” John 6:25-71,

1. What’s the difference in being a Fanatic for your church and a Fair Weather Fan of your church?

A fanatic is going to do what he or she can to keep the church moving forward and making it a place for people to get to know God. A fair weather fan does as little as possible, but wants all the benefits as all the other members of the church have. A fanatic does his or her part and then some. A fair weather fan is content with doing less than they agreed to do.

2. What would happen to you if you were to go a year and God did not answer yes to a single one of your prayers?

I’d probably be discouraged. I’d probably think I was doing something wrong. I’d might even begin to think that God had forgotten about me.

3. Do you think God is obligated to give us a some kind of goodie treat on somewhat a regular basis to keep us cheering in God’s corner? Why?

No I don’t think God is obligated to do so, but it is nice to receive things from God to help us stay motivated. Our faith at times does get weak.

Jesus the Bread of Life (The previous day, Jesus had miraculously fed over 5,000 people from five loaves of bread and two fish. After Jesus had fed them, they claimed that surely Jesus was the Prophet who was to come. They intended to make Jesus king by force but he got away from them. They went looking for Jesus the next day for some more food.) John 6:25-71

²⁵ When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, “Rabbi, when did you get here?” ²⁶ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and

had your fill. ²⁷ Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

²⁸ Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”²⁹ Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”³⁰ So they asked him, “What sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?”³¹ Our ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written: ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’^[c]”

³² Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven. ³³ For the bread of God is the bread that comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.”³⁴ “Sir,” they said, “always give us this bread.”

³⁵ Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never go hungry, and whoever believes in me will never be thirsty. ³⁶ But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe. ³⁷ All whom the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. ³⁸ For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me. ³⁹ And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁰ For my Father’s will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day.”

⁴¹ At this the Jews there began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.” ⁴² They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven’?”

⁴³ “Stop grumbling among yourselves,” Jesus answered. ⁴⁴ “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁴⁵ It is written in the Prophets: ‘They will all be taught by God.’^[d] Everyone who has heard the Father and learned from him comes to me. ⁴⁶ No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father. ⁴⁷ Very truly I tell you, whoever believes has eternal life. ⁴⁸ I am the bread of life. ⁴⁹ Your ancestors ate the manna in the wilderness, yet they died. ⁵⁰ But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which people may eat and not die. ⁵¹ I am the living bread that came down from heaven. Whoever eats of this bread will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world.”

⁵² Then the Jews began to argue sharply among themselves, “How can this man give us his flesh to eat?” ⁵³ Jesus said to them, “Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. ⁵⁴ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. ⁵⁵ For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. ⁵⁶ Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. ⁵⁷ Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. ⁵⁸ This is the bread that came down from heaven. Your ancestors ate manna and died, but whoever feeds on this bread will live forever.” ⁵⁹ He said this while teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum.

Many Disciples Desert Jesus

⁶⁰ On hearing it, many of his disciples said, “This is a hard teaching. Who can accept it?” ⁶¹ Aware that his disciples were grumbling about this, Jesus said to them, “Does this offend you? ⁶² Then what if you see the Son of Man ascend to where he was before! ⁶³ The Spirit gives life; the flesh counts for nothing. The words I have spoken to you—they are full of the Spirit^[e] and life. ⁶⁴ Yet there are some of you who do not believe.” For Jesus had known from the beginning which of them did not believe and who would betray him. ⁶⁵ He went on to say, “This is why I told you that no one can come to me unless the Father has enabled them.” ⁶⁶ From this time many of his disciples turned back and no longer followed him. ⁶⁷ “You do not want to leave too, do you?” Jesus asked the Twelve.

⁶⁸ Simon Peter answered him, “Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. ⁶⁹ We have come to believe and to know that you are the Holy One of God.” ⁷⁰ Then Jesus replied, “Have I not chosen you, the Twelve? Yet one of you is a devil!” ⁷¹ (He meant Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, who, though one of the Twelve, was later to betray him.)

4. Jesus probably would have been fired as a pastor. In one day, with one sermon, he lost thousands of followers. What did Jesus do wrong?

He informed them that he was not there just to give them something free to satisfy them. The only reason to come after him was that he was the Son of God and they must obey Him if they were to get to know the Father.

5. Why was the crowd so large in the first place? What should be the real reason for coming to see Jesus?

Jesus had miraculously fed over 5,000 people and let them eat all they wanted for free. Many people did not know where their next meal would be coming from the next day. So far Jesus to be able to feed people at no charge was something wonderful. They came back again for the free meal. They were willing to listen to him as long as there was going to be food. They were not interested in his message without the free food. The real reason for coming to see Jesus should be a desire to get to know who Jesus is and what Jesus has done.

6. What are some of the difficult types of teachings that God gives to the church to follow today?

The things that our society promotes that are contrary to the gospel, become difficult for the church, because of the desire for acceptance of others. Issues that once were clear become cloudy. The teachings of God are clear on materialism, tithing, abortion, homosexuality, marriage, living together, sex, greed, discrimination, and Jesus as the only way to God have become difficult teachings. They are not difficult in that God has changed them, they are difficult because the society demands that we change them.

7. What is the difference in asking the questions “what’s best for the church” and “what’s best for my church?”

When we ask what’s best for the church, we’re thinking of the kingdom of God and that the church belongs to God. The best interest of the church does not consider any one individual or group. When we ask what’s best for my church, we have shifted our thinking in separating the local church from the body of Christ at large. The words “my church” claims something that does not rightfully belong to us. The church is always God’s church. We discover what’s best for a church by trying to look at it from God’s perspective

8. What does it mean for us to feed on Christ and to drink His blood? What are the alternatives available to us?

This means that we are to look to Christ for our nourishment for life. We are to allow ourselves to become full of Christ. As we fill ourselves with Christ, obeying and following him in every area of our lives will start to become apparent. Our minds begin to think like Christ. Our actions begin to imitate Christ. We start making choices we would rather not make, because they are painful and may cost us friends and relationships.

The alternative is for us to stay in charge of our lives and to allow the our minds to be conformed to the teachings and messages of this world. We are going to be influenced in our thoughts and actions by what we are filled up with on the inside. We deceive ourselves if we think we are making all of our own decisions without being influenced by anyone or anything.

9. Has anyone ever told you, you take your faith too seriously or that you have gone too far in this thing with Jesus? If not, how does that make you feel?

Yes. People have gotten upset over the number of people we have allowed to come and live with us in different time periods of their lives. We have seen it as an extension of our faith, but we have been told "it doesn't take all that."

10. Why does it take adversity to separate the fanatics from the fair weather fan?

*Adversity means there is going to be a price to be paid. Fair weather fans are not interested in paying a price to stay with the team. Jesus put it this way when he was talking about the seed alongside the road in shallow soil. **Matthew 13:20-21 (NIV)**²⁰ The one who received the seed that fell on rocky places is the man who hears the word and at once receives it with joy. ²¹ But since he has no root, he lasts only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the word, he quickly falls away.*

11. When or where are you more apt to be a fair weather fan in your walk with Christ?

Probably in an airport when I have already decided I am going to read a book or do some work. I do not even look for opportunities to be used by God.

12. Why does Jesus ask the twelve disciples if they too wanted to leave Him as well?

This was the first time the disciples had heard this teaching as well. Jesus knew that they could also have had some wrong motives for following him around. After all, they were watching him do miracles, and they were becoming mini-celebrities themselves. Our decision to follow Jesus is always a choice that we have to exercise one way or the other. Jesus issues an invitation, but we have to act upon it.

13. The disciples wanted to stay with Jesus because they believed that He was the Holy One Of God. How critical is it to know that Jesus is the Son of God, to keep us from becoming fair weather believers?

If we know beyond a shadow of a doubt that Jesus is the Son of God, we too will recognize that we have no other place to go if we choose to walk away from Him. Knowing who Jesus is, keeps us from falling for a lot of false teachings.

14. Are you on task with your devotional,

14a. Are you on task with your morning prayer, and looking at your check?

14b. What did you do to come dressed as a fanatic on Sunday?

Life-Sharing Lesson 5 Insanity For Christ “Picking Up Your Cross”

Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 8:34-38

Commentary Matthew 26:36-46

[26:36](#) Then Jesus went with them to a place called Gethsemane; and he said to his disciples, "Sit here while I go over there and pray."^{NRSV} After eating the meal, the disciples left Jerusalem and went out to a favorite meeting place ([Luke 22:39](#); [John 18:2](#)). This gardenlike enclosure called *Gethsemane*, meaning "olive press," was probably an orchard of olive trees with a press for extracting oil. The garden was in the Kidron Valley just outside the eastern wall of Jerusalem and just below the Mount of Olives. Jesus told eight of the disciples to sit down and wait, probably near the garden's entrance, while he went farther in to pray. The disciples must have been physically and emotionally exhausted from trying to comprehend what would transpire. Instead of watching, however, they gave in to their exhaustion and fell asleep.

[26:37-38](#) He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. Then he said to them, "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me."^{NIV} Jesus then took the other three disciples, his inner circle (Peter, James, and John), farther into the garden with him. To these closest friends, Jesus revealed his inner turmoil over the event he was about to face. Jesus was *sorrowful and troubled* over his approaching death because he would be forsaken by the Father ([27:46](#)), would have to bear the sins of the world, and would face a terrible execution. The divine course was set, but Jesus, in his human nature, still struggled ([Hebrews 5:7-9](#)). His coming death was no surprise; he knew about it and had even told the disciples about it so they would be prepared. Jesus knew what his death would accomplish. He also knew that the means to that end would mean taking upon himself the sin of the world, alienating him, for a time, from his Father who would be unable to look upon sin: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" ([2 Corinthians 5:21](#) NIV). Jesus bore our guilt by "becoming a curse for us" ([Galatians 3:13](#) NIV). As the time of this event neared, it became even more horrifying. Jesus naturally recoiled from the prospect.

Early in Jesus' ministry Satan had tempted him to take the easy way out ([4:1-11](#)); later Peter had suggested that Jesus did not have to die ([16:22](#)). In both cases, Jesus had dealt with the temptation soundly. Now, as his horrible death and separation from the Father loomed before him, he was *overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death*. So he asked Peter, James, and John to stay with him and keep

watch. Jesus knew Judas would soon arrive, and Jesus wanted to devote himself to prayer until that time came. Jesus also wanted them to stay awake and participate with him in his suffering. Spiritual vigilance is a vital part of discipleship and a key theme in this book. Jesus wanted these disciples to understand his suffering and to be strengthened by his example when they faced persecution and suffering.

[26:39](#) He went a little farther and fell on His face, and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass from Me; nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will."^{NKJV} Jesus went still farther into the garden to be alone with God. His agony was such that he threw himself on the ground before God in deep spiritual anguish, praying that if possible *let this cup pass*—in other words, he was asking the Father to let the mission be accomplished some other way not requiring the agony of crucifixion, when he would become sin and be separated from the Father. In the Old Testament, "cup" stood for the trial of suffering and the wrath of God ([Isaiah 51:17](#)). So Jesus referred to the suffering that he must endure as the "cup" he would be required to drink. Yet Jesus humbly submitted to the Father's will. He went ahead with the mission for which he had come ([1:21](#)).

With the words "let this cup pass from Me," Jesus was referring to the suffering, isolation from God, and death he would have to endure in order to atone for the sins of the world.

Jesus, as God's Son, recoiled from sin, yet part of his task would be to take the sins of the whole world upon himself. This was a cup he truly hated to drink. In addition, Jesus, as God's Son, knew constant fellowship

Prayer is a shield to the soul, a sacrifice to God, and a scourge to Satan.

John Bunyan

with the Father. Yet for a time on the cross he would have to be deprived of that fellowship. This was a bitter cup. The physical suffering would be horrible enough ([Hebrews 5:7-9](#)), but God's Son also had to accept the cup of spiritual suffering—bearing our sin and being separated from God ([27:46](#)).

Yet Jesus was not trying to get out of his mission. Jesus was expressing his true feelings as a human being, but he was not denying or rebelling against God's will. (Jesus may have been referring to [Isaiah 51:22](#), where God lifted the cup of judgment for the righteous in Jerusalem.) He reaffirmed his desire to do what God wanted by saying, *Nevertheless, not as I will, but as You will*. Jesus' prayer reveals his terrible suffering. Jesus paid for sin by being separated from God. The sinless Son of God took our sins upon himself to save us from suffering and separation.

TRUE PRAYER

In times of suffering, people sometimes wish they knew the future, or they wish they could understand the reason for their anguish. Jesus knew what lay ahead of him, and he knew the reason. Even so, his struggle was intense—more wrenching than any struggle we will ever have to face. What does it take to be able to say "as God wills"? It takes firm trust in God's plans; it takes prayer and obedience each step of the way. This is the heart of true prayer and should be our basic response to trials. Trust God that his way is best, even when it doesn't seem like it.

God did not take away the "cup," for the cup was his will. Yet he did take away Jesus' extreme fear and agitation. Jesus moved serenely through the next several hours, at peace with God, knowing that he was doing his Father's will.

LIFE APPLICATION

PEACE

Some people believe their troubles are caused by bad people, bad germs, or bad luck. But Christians know that God rules, so we rightly make our appeal to his will, which

takes the bitterness out of the cup we may face, though it doesn't always remove the cup. God's will for each of us includes some pain, some loss, some struggle;

never breaks us or makes us feel hopeless or abandoned;

always assures us of God's presence and care; and

ever promises reunion and relief.

Take comfort in God's will for you. Pray sincerely, "Your will be done!"

[26:40-41](#) Then He came to the disciples and found them asleep, and said to Peter, "What? Could you not watch with Me one hour? Watch and pray, lest you enter into temptation."^{NKJV} Jesus got up from his prayer to return to the three disciples. He had told them to stay and keep watch. But instead of showing support for Jesus by remaining awake with him and praying for strength in the coming hours, they had fallen asleep, "exhausted from sorrow" ([Luke 22:45](#) NIV). Also, the hour was very late, perhaps after midnight. Jesus addressed Peter directly. Peter had said he would never leave Jesus; yet when Jesus needed prayer and support, Peter wasn't there for him. Thus, Jesus rebuked Peter for his failure to keep watch for even one hour.

Jesus told the disciples that this was the time to *watch and pray*, for very soon they would face difficult temptations.

Jesus was not only asking that they pray for him, but also that they pray for themselves. Jesus knew that these men would need extra strength to face the temptations

More can be done by prayer than anything else. Prayer is our greatest weapon.

Billy Graham

ahead—temptations to run away or to deny their relationship with him. "Enter into" could also be translated "fall into." Jesus wanted the disciples to pray that their faith would not collapse. The word "temptation" can mean testing or trial. Jesus wanted his disciples to pray for strength to go through the coming ordeal. The disciples were about to see Jesus die. Would they still think he was the Messiah? The disciples would soon face confusion, fear, loneliness, guilt, and the temptation to conclude that they had been deceived.

"The spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak."^{NKJV} Many have interpreted "spirit" to mean the "human spirit." Thus, it would mean that while their spirit might be willing, their *flesh* would be weak. Their inner desires and intentions would be, as they had previously boasted, to never deny Jesus and to die with him. Their relationship with Jesus had made the disciples eager to serve him in any way possible. Yet their human inadequacies, with all their fears and failures, would make it difficult to carry out those good intentions. A *willing* spirit (see [Psalm 51:12](#)) needs the Holy Spirit to empower it and help it do God's will.

Jesus used Peter's drowsiness to warn him to be spiritually vigilant against the temptation he would soon face. The way to overcome temptation is to stay alert and to pray. This means being aware of the possibilities of temptation, sensitive to the subtleties, and morally resolved to fight courageously. Because temptation strikes where we are most vulnerable, we can't resist alone. Prayer is essential because God's strength can shore up our defenses and defeat Satan.

[26:42](#) Again, a second time, He went away and prayed, saying, "O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, Your will be done."^{NKJV} Jesus left the three disciples and returned to his conversation with the Father ([26:39](#)).

[26:43-45](#) And He came and found them asleep again, for their eyes were heavy.^{NKJV} Jesus came back once again to the three disciples and *found them asleep again*. Despite his warning that they should be awake, alert, and praying not to fall to the coming temptations, *their eyes were heavy*, and all three went back to sleep. So He left them, went away again, and prayed the third time, saying the same words.^{NKJV} Jesus continued his conversation with his Father, as before ([26:39](#), [42](#)). During these times of prayer, the battle was won. Jesus still had to go

to the cross, but he would humbly submit to the Father's will and accomplish the task set before him.

Then he came to the disciples and said to them, "Are you still sleeping and taking your rest? See, the hour is at hand, and the Son of Man is betrayed into the hands of sinners."^{NRSV} Jesus went away to pray a third time, only to come back and find the disciples still asleep. After much time in prayer, Jesus was ready to face his *hour*, which conveyed that all he had predicted about his death was about to happen (see [John 12:23-24](#)). The disciples had missed a great opportunity to talk to the Father, and there would be no more time to do so, for Jesus' hour had come. Thus, Jesus did not again tell them to pray. Jesus had spent the last few hours with the Father, wrestling with him, and humbly submitting to him. Now he was prepared to face his betrayer and the *sinner*s who were coming to arrest him. "Sinners" was the term used for Jews who did not live according to God's will and for Gentiles, who were viewed collectively as sinners because they didn't live by God's law. Jesus probably used the term to refer to the priestly authorities who were disobeying God in their treachery, and to the Romans who were participating in Jesus' arrest, mockery, and death.

[26:46](#) "Rise, let us go! Here comes my betrayer!"^{NIV} Jesus roused the three sleeping disciples (and perhaps the other eight as well) and called them together. His words "rise, let us go" did not mean that Jesus was contemplating running. Instead, he was calling the disciples to go with him to meet the traitor disciple, Judas, and the coming crowd. Jesus went forth of his own will, advancing to meet his accusers rather than waiting for them to come to him. Jesus' *betrayer*, Judas, had arrived. Judas knew where to find Jesus and the disciples because Gethsemane had been a favorite meeting spot ([John 18:1-2](#)). It was to this quiet garden in the very early hours of the morning that Judas brought a crowd to arrest Jesus.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Matthew.

COMMENTARY

Mark 8:34-38

[8:34](#) When He had called the people to Himself, with His disciples also, He said to them, "Whoever desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me."^{NKJV} These words were addressed to *the people* in general, as well as to the disciples. Jesus began to speak publicly of his identity as the Messiah, but it was only the suffering aspect that was public; the final disclosure awaited the cross.

The words applied to the disciples and to all who want to *come after* Jesus—that is, to become a disciple and enter his fellowship. Those words include us. This statement offered special comfort to the Christians in Rome to whom Mark was writing, for they often faced persecution for their faith. Jesus invites every person to follow, but one who desires to follow him must have two attitudes: (1) a willingness to deny self and (2) a willingness to take up his or her cross.

To *deny* oneself means to surrender immediate material gratification in order to discover and secure one's true self and God's interests. It is a willingness to let go of selfish desires and earthly security. This attitude turns self-centeredness to God-centeredness.

To *take up [the] cross* was a vivid illustration of the humility and submission Jesus asked of his followers. When Jesus used this picture of his followers taking up their crosses to follow him, the disciples, the people, and the Romans (Mark's original audience) knew what taking up the cross meant. Death on a cross was a form of execution used by Rome for dangerous criminals. A prisoner carried his own cross to the place of execution, signifying submission to Rome's power. Following Jesus, therefore, meant identifying with Jesus and his followers, facing social and political oppression and ostracism, and no turning back. For some, taking up the cross might indeed mean death. But Jesus' words meant that his followers had to be prepared to obey God's Word and follow his will no matter what the consequences for the sake of the gospel (8:35). Soon after this, Jesus would take up his own cross. Jesus is speaking prophetically here as well.

LIFE APPLICATION

COSTLY COMMITMENT

Christians follow their Lord by imitating his life and obeying his commands. To take up the cross meant to carry your own cross to the place where you would be killed. Many Galileans had been killed that way by the Romans. Applied to the disciples, to take up the cross meant to identify completely with Christ's message, even if death were to result. We must deny our selfish desires to use our time and money our own way and to choose our own direction in life without regard to Christ. Following Christ is costly now, but we are promised true victory and eternal rewards.

The initial decision to "come after" Christ and be his disciple is a once-for-all act. From then on the believer is no longer his or her own; that person belongs to Christ. To *follow* Christ is also a moment-by-moment decision, requiring denial of self and

taking up one's cross. Following Jesus doesn't mean walking behind him, but taking the same road of sacrifice and service that he took. The blessing for us is that we can fellowship with him along the way.

[8:35](#) "For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake and the gospel's will save it."^{NKJV} The Christian life is a paradox: to attempt to *save* your life means only to *lose* it. The Greek word for "life" is *psuche* referring to the soul, the part of the person that includes the personality with all its dreams, hopes, and goals. A person who "saves" his or her life in order to satisfy desires and goals apart from God ultimately "loses" life. Not only does that person lose the eternal life offered only to those who believe and accept Christ as Savior, but he or she loses the fullness of life promised to those who believe.

By contrast, those who willingly "lose" their lives for the sake of Christ and of the gospel (that is, God's kingdom) actually "save" them. To lose one's life for Christ's sake refers to a person refusing to renounce Christ, even if the punishment were death. To lose one's life for the gospel's sake implies that the person is on trial for preaching and circulating the Christian message.

To be willing to put personal desires and life itself into God's hands means to understand that nothing that we can gain on our own in our earthly lives can compare to what we gain with Christ. Jesus wants us to *choose* to follow him rather than to lead a life of sin and self-satisfaction. He wants us to stop trying to control our own destiny and to let him direct us. This makes good sense because, as the Creator, Christ knows better than we do what real life is about. He asks for submission, not self-hatred; he asks us only to lose our self-centered determination to be in charge.

LIFE APPLICATION

REAL VICTORY, REAL PROGRESS

Jesus would lose his physical life; the possibility of death was very real for the disciples as well. We may not be called to die for our faith, but real discipleship implies real commitment—pledging our whole existence to his service. If we try to save our physical life from death, pain, or discomfort, we may risk losing our true eternal life. If we protect ourselves from pain, we begin to die spiritually and emotionally. Our lives turn inward, and we lose our intended purpose. When we give our lives in service to Christ, however, we discover the real purpose of living.

[8:36](#) "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?"^{NKJV} To reinforce his words in [8:35](#), Jesus asked his listeners a rhetorical question. What good would it be for a person to gain *the whole world* (that is, to have power or financial control over the entire world system of which Satan is the head) but to lose his or her soul (that is, to lose eternal life with God)?

Every person will die, even those most powerful or most wealthy. If they have not taken care to "save" their lives for eternity with God, then they have gained nothing and have lost everything.

He is no fool who gives what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose.

Jim Elliott

Jesus had faced this exact temptation in the wilderness: "The devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 'All this I will give you,' he said, 'if you will bow down and worship me.' Jesus said to him, 'Away from me, Satan! For it is written: "Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only"' ([Matthew 4:8-10](#) NIV).

[8:37](#) "Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"^{NKJV} Many people spend all their energy seeking pleasure. Jesus said, however, that a world of pleasure centered on possessions, position, or power is ultimately worthless. Whatever a person has on earth is only temporary; it cannot be exchanged for his or her soul. If you work hard at getting what you want, you might eventually have a "pleasurable" life, but in the end you will find it hollow and empty. The answer to the question, then, is that nothing is of enough value that it can be exchanged for one's soul. Even if a person gained the world, that person would lose his or her soul—and the soul counts for eternity. No amount of money, power, or status can buy back a lost soul. Believers must be willing to make the pursuit of God more important than the selfish pursuit of pleasure. If we follow Jesus, we will know what it means to live abundantly now and to have eternal life as well.

[8:38](#) "Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels."^{NRSV} Jesus constantly turned the world's perspective upside down with talk of first and last, saving and losing. Here he offered his listeners a choice. If they chose to be *ashamed* of Jesus, Jesus would in turn be ashamed of them at his second coming (they would be rejected from eternal life with him). In the Bible, "ashamed" means more than embarrassment. It refers to the judgment of God: "[Idolmakers] will be put to shame" ([Isaiah 44:11](#) NIV). It stands for deep and contrite repentance: "That they may be ashamed of their sins" ([Ezekiel 43:10](#) NIV). It can mean submission before God: "Nations will see and be

ashamed" ([Micah 7:16](#) NIV). When God judges unbelieving people, his "being ashamed of them" means he will reject them.

By extension, those who were not ashamed of Jesus and his words, in spite of the *adulterous and sinful generation* that believed otherwise, would be accepted by Christ *when he comes in . . . glory*. Many are fearless in business, battle, or sports but cower at potential ridicule. Speak up for your faith, for your convictions, and for Christ.

LIFE APPLICATION

LOSERS AND WINNERS

Peter was not happy to learn that Jesus would be humiliated and crucified. That was not Peter's plan for the Messiah. We can understand his feelings. Few people today want to identify with a "loser." Like Peter, we fail to see the whole story, which will conclude with a grand and spectacular climax of amazing power and triumph—Jesus' return in glory.

Have you been ashamed to identify with a "loser"? When Jesus returns, who will be the loser? Take your stand for Jesus now. On that day when he returns, you'll greet him as Savior, friend, and Lord, as happy as a tired traveler rounding the bend toward home.

Jesus was speaking in the third person, but was referring to himself as the *Son of Man* who will judge when *he comes* with *his Father* and the angels. Jesus Christ has been given the authority to judge all the earth ([Romans 14:9-11](#); [Philippians 2:9-11](#)). Although his judgment is already working in our lives, there is a future final judgment when Christ returns (see [Matthew 25:31-46](#)) to review and evaluate everyone's life. (See [1 Thessalonians 5:4-11](#) on how we are to live until Jesus returns and [2 Thessalonians 1:5-10](#) on how God will judge those who trouble us.) This judgment will not be confined to unbelievers; Christians too will be judged. Their eternal destiny is secure, but Jesus will review how they handled gifts, opportunities, and responsibilities in order to determine their heavenly rewards. At the time of judgment, God will deliver the righteous and condemn the wicked. Rejecting Christ may help us escape shame for the time being, but it will guarantee an eternity of shame later.

Life-Sharing Lesson 5 Insanity For Christ “Picking Up Your Cross” Matthew 26:36-46, Mark 8:34-38

1. When was the last time you said yes to something or someone, that you really did not want to comply to, but you did it anyways? Why did you do it?

I followed my mother’s driving instructions on which way to get to a destination. I did it because I loved her and wanted to minimize her getting upset with me.

Matthew 26:36-46

³⁶ Then Jesus went with his disciples to a place called Gethsemane, and he said to them, “Sit here while I go over there and pray.” ³⁷ He took Peter and the two sons of Zebedee along with him, and he began to be sorrowful and troubled. ³⁸ Then he said to them, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death. Stay here and keep watch with me.”

³⁹ Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will.”⁴⁰ Then he returned to his disciples and found them sleeping. “Couldn’t you men keep watch with me for one hour?” he asked Peter. ⁴¹ “Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation. The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak.”

⁴² He went away a second time and prayed, “My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done.”⁴³ When he came back, he again found them sleeping, because their eyes were heavy. ⁴⁴ So he left them and went away once more and prayed the third time, saying the same thing.⁴⁵ Then he returned to the disciples and said to them, “Are you still sleeping and resting? Look, the hour is near, and the Son of Man is delivered into the hands of sinners. ⁴⁶ Rise! Let us go! Here comes my betrayer!”

2. Why is Jesus so troubled in this passage?

Jesus is troubled because he knows the pain of the crucifixion is about to enter his life. He is not anxious to endure the cross, yet Jesus wants to do the will of the Father to complete the mission that he was sent to do.

3. How do you handle a conflict when God is asking you to do something, that you clearly do not want to do?

I spend time in prayer, hoping that God might sometimes change His mind. I sometimes hope my willingness to do something will be enough to get God to say okay you don't have to do it. That does not always work.

4. Why does Jesus yield himself to saying yes to the will of His Father?

Jesus goal has always been to do the Father's will. He wants to please His Father by completing the task of doing what is necessary for God to reveal His love for the whole world. The means the Father had chosen was to give His Son so that the world might be saved through him.

The Way of the Cross

Mark 8:34-38 ³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ³⁵ For whoever wants to save their life ^[b] will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. ³⁶ What good is it for you to gain the whole world, yet forfeit your soul? ³⁷ Or what can you give in exchange for your soul? ³⁸ If any of you are ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of you when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

5. Who is the “whoever” that Jesus is referring to in verse 34?

Whoever refers to anyone, which means everybody. No one is too good or too bad, too old or too young, too rich or too poor for the invitation that Jesus is giving. If you are alive, you need to know about this invitation from Jesus. There are no prerequisites to accept the invitation.

6. Why do you think Jesus gives the same challenge to the crowd and his disciples? Wouldn't the disciples already be doing the things in verse 34?

Jesus wanted the disciples to know that they were not in privileged spot simply by traveling with him. They were being offered the same invitation to deny themselves by picking up their crosses. Once they had their crosses in hand, they would then be free to follow Him. Everyone in the audience knew that picking up one's cross meant marching to one's death. People who grow up in the church have no advantage over people who did not have a church background. Both groups are given the same invitation to pick up their crosses and follow Jesus.

7. In John 3:16, we are told that whoever “believes” in Christ shall be saved? How is this different from what Jesus is saying in verse 34?

John 3:16 ¹⁶ For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.

Mark 8:34 ³⁴ Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: “Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

One has to understand, to believe something is more than an intellectual assent or comment. To believe something means to act upon a truth. To believe in Jesus is demonstrated by denying oneself, picking one's cross, and following after Jesus. One does not truly believe something until one's actions begins to conform to the truth of what is believed.

8. How far are we to go in denying ourselves to follow Jesus? Is this an insane demand on Jesus' part? Why?

Jesus does not put a limit on what type or size of cross we are called to pick up and how long we will be carrying it. He does not define how many times we will have to deny ourselves. He does not even say where it is we will be going. The demand is insane only to those who do not believe that Jesus can be fully trusted and that He is the Son of God.

9. What do you think it actually mean to pick up a cross and follow Jesus?

I think Jesus is saying all other relationships in your life are going to change, including your relationship to yourself. From here on out, My claim upon your life has to be supreme. Jesus shows us how far we are to go in changing our relationships when he says in [□ Luke 14:26](#) "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even life itself—such a person cannot be my disciple.

10. Do we all pick up the same cross, do we all get to choose our cross, and what if we don't like our cross?

It becomes evident very quickly that we will be carrying different crosses that are tailored made for each of us. When it comes to denying ourselves, we aren't equal in the opportunities we may have to turn down. Yet we will all have to turn down something. We are not equal in the kinds of temptations we face. Yet we all will have temptations. We will all have a cross waiting for us. We will not get to choose the cross because our current circumstances will have a lot to do with the cross we are to bear at the moment. Our crosses will be shaped by the actions of other who are a part of our lives. None of us will like our particular cross, and what others think is our cross, may not be a cross at all for us. Our true cross may be hidden from the world, and only we and God know what it is.

11. Is picking up your cross more of a positive or negative event? Why?

Picking up your cross is actually a way of saying yes to the will of God for this moment. If you emphasize picking up your cross as a negative thing you are giving up to serve God, it's easy to become self-righteous. "Look at what I gave up to serve God." If you see picking up your cross as a liberating thing to do in order to prepare to serve God, your cross becomes an opportunity to prepare you for service. You recognize your need to let go of something which is hindering your walk with the Lord. Whatever you were holding to, was keeping you from being drawn closer to God. Your cross becomes your road to freedom.

12. Do you think Jesus is saying that if we do not do verse 34, then somehow we are selling our souls for something else? Can you think of something you may be selling your soul for in exchange as opposed to following Christ?

Yes, we are selling our souls for something else whether we recognize it or not when we are not following Christ. There is a temptation even after we follow Christ to sell our souls for some temptations that come our way.

13. Why does Jesus appear to try to keep discouraging people from following Him with his insane claims on their lives? Wouldn't there be more followers if Jesus spent more time teaching on what to expect in heaven?

Jesus is not trying to get people to go to heaven. Jesus is trying to get people to enter into a relationship with Him. If people do not want to get to know God now, then telling them about heaven is not going to cause them to want to be in a relationship with God. It would be no different than feeding people bread who only showed up to get more bread. Jesus is not interested in bribing us to follow Him. He wants us to know what the cost is that is involved in getting to know Him. Jesus knows that his claims

14. Have you had the opportunity to use your cross this week to make a difference in something you were about to do?

14.(b) Do you have a button testimony?

14(c) How are you doing with your devotions?

**Life-Sharing Lesson 6 “Insanity For Christ: Own Your Potential” 1
Corinthians 12:4-11, Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:11-13**

Commentary

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

12:4-6 Now there are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but it is the same Holy Spirit who is the source of them all. There are different kinds of service in the church, but it is the same Lord we are serving. There are different ways God works in our lives, but it is the same God who does the work through all of us.^{NLT} The answers that Paul has given to the Corinthians' questions thus far in this letter have focused on unity among believers, order in the church, and exaltation of Jesus Christ. So with the concern about spiritual gifts, Paul was concerned that the Corinthians' focus on any particular gift, such as "tongues," or ecstatic speech, would tear them apart. While the specific question is unknown, Paul clearly wanted the believers to understand that tongues had their place but should not be sought by everyone. In the broad context of spiritual gifts, the gift of tongues was just one gift. *There are different kinds of spiritual gifts . . . different kinds of service in the church . . . different ways God works in our lives.* God's people receive many kinds of gifts, and no one gift is better than another. This may also have been a problem in Corinth—some believers may have been belittling some gifts. This chapter explains that all the gifts come from one source and are to be used for one purpose. The one source is the Trinity—*God* the Father, the *Lord* Christ, and the *Holy Spirit*. The one purpose is the building up of the body of Christ—which happens as the gifts are used to their fullest potential, as the people serve the Lord and one another, and as God works through his people.

These gifts are just that—gifts. They are not earned. They are not given to believers asking for a specific one. They are not chosen by people. God alone administers the gifts among his people. God, not believers, controls the gifts. Each believer, then, is responsible to seek God's guidance in discovering his or her particular gift(s) and then discovering how best to use them for God's purposes.

LIFE APPLICATION

SPECIALIZATION

God is completely involved in the giving, using, and empowering of gifts. Specific gifts, places of service, and activities vary, but they all have their best effects when they build up the body of Christ—the church. God creates

a unique place in the body for every believer. Gifts and ministries may overlap, but each believer has a specialized, God-designed role. Part of the exciting adventure of following Christ involves discovering one's service contribution and then making it available to God. Make serving God and his people your motive as you utilize your gifts.

12:7 A spiritual gift is given to each of us as a means of helping the entire church.^{NLT} Every believer has at least one spiritual gift—a *spiritual gift is given to each of us*. The gifts are not to cause division among the believers, jealously regarding who received a particular gift when another person desired it, or rivalry over the use of similar gifts. Instead, God graciously gives spiritual gifts *as a means of helping the entire church*. Spiritual gifts are not for private use or as a badge to be worn proudly; instead, they are to be used publicly to build up the church. Some gifts help those in the church to grow closer to Christ. Other gifts bring outsiders into the church. Others help to encourage those in the church who are carrying burdens. All these gifts are needed, for different needs require different kinds of service. (See also the [Life Application Bible Commentary Ephesians, 4:7-12.](#))

Some people have interpreted this verse to imply that each person must have a gift; therefore, each believer must identify it and insist on using it. It may be true that every believer has a gift (**12:11**), but this statement was meant to counter those in Corinth who believed that every person *had* to speak in tongues. Such a view is wrong. What Paul stressed was the manifestation of the Spirit, the great variety and diversity of the gifts of the triune God (**12:4-6**), and the importance of using the gifts to help others.

12:8 To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom.^{NIV} To illustrate that there are a wide variety of gifts from the Holy Spirit, Paul gave a list. This list was not meant to be exhaustive; it merely illustrates many of the different kinds of spiritual gifts. The Spirit gives many gifts; the Bible contains no definitive list of all the gifts.

To one person, explained Paul, the Spirit gives *the message of wisdom*. The problem of wisdom (human versus divine) was a hot topic in Corinth. At the beginning of this letter (**1:17–2:16**), Paul spent several paragraphs explaining the difference between God's wisdom and human "wisdom."

All believers are given wisdom from the Spirit (2:15-16), but some are given the ability to give the "message of wisdom." This may refer to the promise of Christ (see [Luke 21:15](#)) that the Spirit would give special wisdom to those facing adversaries and persecution. Based on Paul's argument in chapter 1, it most likely refers to recognizing Christ crucified as the basis of God's true wisdom, and proclaiming Christ in this way. That this particular gift does not occur on any of the other lists of gifts has led some scholars to think that this gift was especially

important (and more prominent) for the believers in the Greek city of Corinth, where the issue of "wisdom" was causing much discussion.

LIFE APPLICATION

GIFT LIST

Like other lists of spiritual gifts in the New Testament (see 12:27-31; 14; [Romans 12:4-8](#); [Ephesians 4:11-13](#)), it appears that Paul meant this list to be suggestive rather than exhaustive. The list provides us with a starting point. We must recognize, however, that God's purpose in giving gifts has little to do with self-esteem. We cannot ask for gifts in order to feel more powerful, important, or significant ([James 4:3](#)). When we make it our goal to be available to God and to seek to serve others for Christ's sake, our spiritual gifts will come to the surface. We may need the insight of others to recognize our specific gifts. Consider these steps:

1. Ask God to increase your usefulness.
2. Seek opportunities of service.
3. Observe how other believers serve.
4. Ask those you've served and those who serve with you to help you discern your spiritual strengths.
5. Practice those gifts even more.

To another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit.^{NIV} Another person might be given *the message of knowledge*. As with "wisdom," the Corinthians also believed they had special "knowledge." People may think they have all kinds of wisdom and knowledge, which leads to pride, but true wisdom and knowledge are found in Christ alone. But to some people *the same Spirit* gives extraordinary knowledge. This could mean a special knowledge of spiritual realities (see 13:2, 8-12; 14:6) or knowledge given to teachers who are training others in Christian truth.

[12:9](#) The Spirit gives special faith to another.^{NLT} All Christians have faith because the faith that brings a person to salvation is the work of the Holy Spirit. "God saved you by his special favor when you believed. And you can't take credit for this; it is a gift from God" ([Ephesians 2:8](#) NLT; see also [Galatians 5:22](#); [1 Timothy 4:12-14](#)). Some people, however, have the spiritual gift of *faith*, which is an unusual measure of trust in the Holy Spirit's power. In [13:2](#), Paul describes this gift further: "If I had the gift of faith so that I could speak to a mountain and make it move . . ." (NLT).

This kind of faith is a supernatural trust in God's miraculous power for specific situations. While the next two gifts, healing and doing miracles, are listed separately, this gift of faith is surely connected to the ability to do such acts through the Holy Spirit. This gift of faith could also be manifested in believers' willingness to face persecution and martyrdom without renouncing what they believed.

To another gifts of healing by that one Spirit.^{NIV} The next two gifts (healing and miracles) are visual manifestations of the Spirit. The *gifts of healing* had been manifested through Peter, Paul, and the other apostles (see, for example, [Acts 3:6-8](#); [5:15-16](#); [9:33-34](#); [14:8-10](#)). The gift of healing is given, not to the person healed, but to the person who does the healing. Some people want to say they have received the gift of healing for an illness they have, but the gifts are given to be used to benefit others.

[12:10](#) He gives one person the power to perform miracles.^{NLT} As with the gifts of healing ([12:9](#)), the Spirit will give to some an extraordinary power to *perform miracles*. While performing a healing would be considered a miracle, the inclusion of this gift separately from healings refers to other miraculous manifestations of the Spirit (see [Galatians 3:5](#)).

And to another the ability to prophesy.^{NLT} The rest of the gifts mentioned in this passage focus on verbal manifestations of the Spirit. To some people, the Spirit gives a special *ability to prophesy*. "Prophesy" does not just refer to predicting the future; it can also mean giving a message received from God to the community of believers: "One who prophesies is helping others grow in the Lord, encouraging and comforting them" ([14:3](#) NLT). The prophet Joel had written the words of the Lord, "I will pour out my Spirit upon all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy" ([Joel 2:28](#) NLT). As with the gift of faith, the ability to share one's faith with power is available to everyone (see [14:1-5](#)), but to some the Spirit gives a special measure of this gift. Paul wrote in Romans, "God has given each of us the ability to do certain things well. So if God has given you the ability to prophesy, speak out when you have faith that God is speaking through you" ([Romans 12:6](#) NLT). Some have interpreted "prophecy" to be fulfilled in various sermons throughout church history. Others, however, say that prophecy is not a sermon, but a spontaneous, Spirit-inspired message that is orally delivered in the congregation for the edification and encouragement of the body of Christ.

He gives someone else the ability to know whether it is really the Spirit of God or another spirit that is speaking.^{NLT} Because there are many false teachers who claim to "prophesy" for God, some in the church are given *the ability to know whether it is really the Spirit of God or another spirit that is speaking*. While some believers have a special gift to discern what is really from God's Spirit and what is not, all believers

are expected to have discernment: "Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1 NIV; see also 1 Thessalonians 5:20-21). But since the gift mentioned here is also described in 14:29 ("Let two or three prophesy, and let the others evaluate what is said"; NLT), this kind of spiritual discernment pertains specifically to oracular manifestations in Christian meetings. Paul's mention of this shows his concern for the protection of the truth in the worship service. Those given the gift of special discernment can help separate truth from error.

Still another person is given the ability to speak in unknown languages, and another is given the ability to interpret what is being said.^{NLT} Opinions differ over exactly what Paul meant by *unknown languages*. Some believe that this refers to earthly languages that a person did not know before (the same as the gift described in Acts 2:4, 7-8). Other scholars say that this refers to an "ecstatic" language, a "heavenly" language. Most likely the second view is correct. Probably the only time that the word "tongues" refers to other earthly languages is when describing Pentecost (Acts 2:4, 7-8). The rest of the time in the New Testament, the word refers to ecstatic languages unknown to anyone—"tongues of angels" (13:1). Speaking in tongues *is* a legitimate gift of the Spirit. The exercise of the gift demands some guidelines (as noted in chapter 14) so that the *purpose* of the gift—to help the body of Christ—is not lost. Those who speak in tongues should follow the guidelines; those who do not speak in tongues ought *not* seek the gift as a sign of salvation or as a sign of special closeness with God, for it is neither. It is a gift of God, given only to whomever God chooses. If a person has not experienced the gift of tongues, he or she ought not seek it but seek what gifts God *has* given.

12:11 It is the one and only Holy Spirit who distributes these gifts. He alone decides which gift each person should have.^{NLT} This verse repeats the point made in 12:1, 4-6—that the source of all the gifts *is the one and only Holy Spirit*. The Holy Spirit gives *these gifts* (again emphasizing the diversity), but they are to be used for God's divine purpose. Because the Holy Spirit *alone decides which gift each person should have*, there is no place for rivalry, jealousy, or pride among believers regarding their gifts. God, through his Spirit, gives to every person in the community of believers exactly the right gifts for him or her to provide the needed services for the church and for God's kingdom.

Whatever the practice of different churches, believers must realize that the Holy Spirit does not submit to any view of methodology. He cannot be limited or confined to cultural or contemporary views of propriety. All believers need to be open to God's gracious power in their lives and in their worship.

LIFE APPLICATION

THE GIFT GIVER

No matter what gift(s) a person has, all spiritual gifts are distributed by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit decides which gifts each believer should have. We are responsible to use and sharpen our gifts, but we can take no credit for what God has freely given us.

Note that discussions about spiritual gifts usually create difficulties when two central points are overlooked: (1) Properly used, spiritual gifts are not self-serving but serve the whole body of Christ (cf. [verse 7](#)); (2) each gift becomes practically useless when used without love (as Paul will make clear in [chapter 13](#)). As we seek to identify and utilize the gifts, let us make the love of God and the love of fellow Christians our highest motives.

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – 1 & 2 Corinthians.

COMMENTARY ROMANS 12:3-8

12:3 By the grace given to me I say.^{NRSV} Paul is here speaking as an apostle (see [1:5](#)). The authority he was about to exercise was not his own by right, but was an evidence of God's grace. He firmly claimed to speak for another.

Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought.^{NIV} Inflated pride has no place in a believer's life (see [3:27](#); [11:18](#), [20](#)). This is especially significant in light of Paul's teaching up to this point in his letter. The Jews are not better than the Gentiles; the Gentiles are not better than the Jews. Rather, all are dependent on God's mercy for their salvation, thus there is no room for pride. Any such pride would undermine the oneness vital to the growth of the church.

Don't let the world around you squeeze you into its own mould, but let God re-mould your minds from within, so that you may prove in Practice that the plan of God for you is good, meets all his demands, and moves towards the goal of true maturity ([Romans 12:2](#)).

J. B. Phillips

Think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.^{NIV} Each believer's personal appraisal ought to be honest. Neither an inflated ego nor a deflated person is free to obey. God has given each believer a *measure of faith* with which to serve him. This expression refers to the spiritual capacity and/or power given to each person to carry out his or her function in the church. The concept of "measure" is described further in [12:6](#), where Paul uses the

terminology "different gifts, according to the grace given us." It is God's discernment, not ours, that gives out the measure for service. Whatever we have in the way of natural abilities or spiritual gifts all should be used with humility for building up the body of Christ. If we are proud, we cannot exercise our faith and gifts to benefit others. And if we consider ourselves worthless, we also withhold what God intended to deliver to others through us.

LIFE APPLICATION

SELF-WORTH

Healthy self-esteem is important because some of us think too little of ourselves; on the other hand, some of us overestimate ourselves. The key to an honest and accurate evaluation is knowing the basis of our self-worth—our identity in Christ. Apart from him, we aren't capable of very much by eternal standards; in him, we are valuable and capable of worthy service. Evaluating ourselves by worldly standards of success and achievement can cause us to think too much about our worth in the eyes of others and thus miss our true value in God's eyes.

12:4 We have many members in one body.^{NKJV} Replacing the national identity that had once set apart God's people, Paul gives a new picture of the identity of God's redeemed people. They are like a *body*. Each of us has one body, but it has many parts—eyes, ears, fingers, toes, blood vessels, muscles. And all the members do not have the same function.^{NKJV} Not every part of our body can see; not every part hears. Instead, each part has a specific function, and they all must work together if the body is going to move and act correctly. (See also [1 Corinthians 12:12-27](#).)

We are called to bear that image as a Body because any one of us taken individually would present an incomplete image, one partly false and always distorted, like a single glass chip hacked from a mirror. But collectively, in all our diversity, we can come together as a community of believers to restore the image of God in the world.

Paul Brand

12:5 In Christ we who are many form one body.^{NIV} Just as our physical bodies are composed of many parts, so the "body of Christ" is made up of many believers who all perform different yet vital functions. And as our bodies cannot be taken apart, so each member, each believer in the body of Christ, belongs to all the others.^{NIV} The

members work together to make the body work; the body doesn't exist to serve the members, and the body is not dependent on one or two of its members to run the show. Every person has his or her part to do. When it is not done, the body suffers.

Even a superficial grasp of this *one body* imagery demolishes much of the individualized religion of our day. The overemphasis given to personal opinion tends to create an all-too-fragile unity, given the real nature of those being brought together. As sinners, we are naturally divisive; so it is only through the presence and work of Christ that we can remain together. Only *in Christ* is there basis for unity that transcends differences. Perhaps more churches and relationships between believers would be preserved if we ended every disagreement with a genuine question, "Are we still together in Christ?"

12:6 Different gifts.^{NIV} We must be humble and recognize our partnership in the body of Christ. Only then can our gifts be used effectively, and only then can we appreciate others' gifts. God gives us gifts so we can build up his church. To use them effectively, we must:

- realize that all gifts and abilities come from God
- understand that not everyone has the same gifts nor all the gifts
- know who we are and what we do best dedicate our gifts to God's service and not to our personal success
- be willing to utilize our gifts wholeheartedly, not holding back anything from God's service.

According to the grace given to us.^{NRSV} God's gifts differ in nature, power, and effectiveness according to his wisdom and graciousness, not according to our faith. The "measure of faith" (**12:3**) or the "proportion" of faith means that God will give the spiritual power necessary and appropriate to carry out each responsibility. We cannot, by our own effort or willpower, drum up more faith and thus be more effective teachers or servants. These are God's gifts to his church, and he gives faith and power as he wills. Our role is to be faithful and to seek ways to serve others with what Christ has given us.

It is only rarely that prophecy in the New Testament has to do with foretelling the future; it usually has to do with foretelling the word of God.

William Barclay

Prophesying . . . in proportion to his faith.^{NIV} The gifts Paul mentions in this list fall into two categories: speaking and serving. Gifts are given that God's grace may be expressed. Words speak to our hearts and minds of God's grace; acts of service

show that grace in action. This list is not exhaustive; there are many gifts, most of them hidden from the public, those "behind the scenes" words and actions that serve and magnify God.

Prophesying, according to the New Testament, is not always predicting the future. Often it means effectively communicating God's messages ([1 Corinthians 14:1-3](#)). Another translation of *in proportion to his faith* would be "in agreement to the faith"; in other words, the message communicated must be true to the tenets of the Christian faith. The way that Paul refers to each of these gifts focuses on their importance in use. These gifts are not for having, but for using. In other words, God's gifts fulfill their value as they are utilized for the benefit of others. Discovery of God's gifts to us ought to be followed by putting them to work.

[12:7-8](#) Serving . . . serve. If a person has the gift of serving, then he or she should use it where and when it is needed, and use it to its best and fullest capacity. The same goes for the other gifts that Paul mentions: teaching . . . encouraging . . . contributing to the needs of others . . . leadership . . . [and] showing mercy.^{NIV} Whatever gift a believer has, he or she should faithfully use it in gratitude to God. By focusing on the application of the gifts, Paul is removing the tendency toward unhealthy self-congratulation in the discovery of gifts. If we are busy using our gifts, we will be less taken up with concerns over status and power. Genuine service controls pride.

When studying this list of gifts, one might imagine the characteristics of the people who would have them. Prophets are often bold and articulate. Servers (those in ministry) are faithful and loyal. Teachers are clear thinkers. Encouragers know how to motivate others. Givers are generous and trusting. Leaders are good organizers and managers. Those who show mercy are caring people who are happy to give their time to others.

This list of gifts is representative, not exhaustive. It would be difficult for one person to embody all these gifts. An assertive prophet usually would not make a good counselor, and a generous giver might fail as a leader. When people identify their own gifts and their unique combination of gifts (this list is far from complete), they should then discover how they can use their gifts to build up Christ's body, the church. At the same time, they should realize that one or two gifts can't do all the work of the church. Believers should be thankful for each other, thankful that others have gifts that are completely different. In the church, believers' strengths and weaknesses can balance each other. Some people's abilities compensate for other people's deficiencies. Together all believers can build Christ's church. But all these gifts will be worthless if they are used begrudgingly out of duty, or if they are exercised without love (see also [1 Corinthians 13:1-3](#)).

Life Application Bible Commentary - Life Application Bible Commentary – Romans.

CHART: GIFT DISCOVERY

Believers will respond differently in the same circumstances. Recognizing what our initial response might be will help us identify the general nature of our gifts. For example, imagine that a destitute family attends your worship service next Sunday. How will different believers respond? The responses that are most similar to what you would do will give you clues to your gifts.

The <i>prophets</i> will ask the congregation . . .	"What went wrong here that needs to be corrected? What caused this family to experience these problems?"
The <i>servers</i> will ask the person . . .	"Are there others we need to help?"
The <i>teachers</i> will ask the person . . .	"What can we do for you?"
The <i>encouragers</i> will say to the person . . .	"How can we help you avoid this situation in the future? What skills, wisdom, and spiritual insights will give you better direction?"
The <i>givers</i> will ask the person . . .	"You must be feeling bad. Please know that we will care for you any way we can. Before you know it, you will be helping someone else."
The <i>leaders</i> will ask the church . . .	"How much will you need to meet your needs? How can we respond to this need in the most effective manner?"
The <i>merciful</i> . . .	will probably not ask any questions, but welcome the person with smiles, hugs, warm acceptance, and understanding.

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COMMENTARY
Ephesians 4:11-13

LIFE APPLICATION

OPEN YOUR GIFT

Oneness in Christ does not destroy individuality. The Holy Spirit has given each Christian special gifts for building up the church. Now that we have these gifts, it is crucial to use them. Are you spiritually mature, exercising the gifts God has given you? If you know what your gifts are, look for opportunities to serve. If you don't know, ask God to show you, perhaps with the help of your minister or Christian friends. Then, as you begin to recognize your special area of service, use your gifts to strengthen and encourage the church.

4:11 The gifts he gave were that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.^{NRSV} This expands on the thought begun in **4:7-8** regarding the gifts Christ gave. In this context, these gifts are actually people who have been called to special functions. Not all people have all the gifts, for Paul was clear to explain that *some* would be gifted in one area and *some* in another. The list given here is by no means complete (for other types of gifts, see [Romans 12](#); [1 Corinthians 12](#)). According to the Greek, all the people listed are direct objects of "gave," indicating that God gave these people to the church as gifts. The offices listed here focus mainly on those who proclaim the gospel and teach the truth.

First listed are the *apostles* and *prophets*, about whom we have already read. They are the foundation for Christ's temple (see [2:20](#) and [3:6](#) and commentary there). "Apostles" included the eleven men Jesus called (without Judas), plus others who are called apostles—such as Paul himself ([Romans 1:1](#)), Matthias ([Acts 1:26](#)), Barnabas ([Acts 14:14](#)), Jesus' brother James ([Galatians 1:19](#)), Silas ([1 Thessalonians 2:6](#)), Andronicus and Junias ([Romans 16:7](#)). It seems that the qualifications for being an apostle were to have seen the risen Christ, to have been sent out by him to preach the gospel, and to be working on behalf of the kingdom, building its foundation (as noted in [2:20](#)). Paul also notes "signs, wonders, and miracles" as marks of a true apostle ([2 Corinthians 12:12](#)).

God also gave *prophets* to the church. These people, also laborers on the church's "foundation" ([2:20](#)), had special gifts in ministering God's messages to his people. At times they would foretell the future ([Acts 11:28](#); [21:9, 11](#)), but more often their job was to exhort, encourage, and strengthen God's people ([Acts 15:32](#); [1 Corinthians 14:29](#)). God spoke through prophets—inspiring them with specific messages for particular times and places.

The *evangelists* were the traveling ministers, similar to the missionaries of today. They went to non-Christian people and proclaimed the gospel to them, often being the first to start a church in a particular area ([Acts 21:8](#); [2 Timothy 4:5](#)).

Next, God gave *pastors and teachers*. These two gifts are likely the same. While the apostles, prophets, and evangelists had a universal sphere of function (the church as a whole), the pastors and teachers probably served in the local churches. Like shepherds, they tended God's "flock," handling the day-to-day affairs of their congregation—administering, counseling, guiding, feeding.

LIFE APPLICATION

WHO'S YOUR MINISTER?

How many ministers are there in your church? One? Three? If it's a big church—eight or ten? Before you answer that question, read [Ephesians 4:11-12](#) carefully. Here Paul shows that God gives pastors and teachers to his church not to *be* the ministers of the church but to *equip* the ministers. Who then are the ministers? All Christians are to be ministers, so you are one of them. The role of pastors and teachers is to train and equip the "saints" (all believers) to be able to serve in whatever ways that God has called them. So if your church has one hundred members and only one minister, there's a big problem. We are all called to be ministers. What is your ministry? How are you being equipped for it? In what ways are you using that training and your gift(s) for the building up of the body?

4:12 To equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.^{NRSV} These specially gifted people ([4:11](#)) were given to the church for one ultimate goal: *to equip the saints*. The word for "equip" means to make right, like the setting of a broken bone, or to bring to completion by training or restoring. The apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers furnish and equip the believers to do the work of the ministry, which results in the *building up the body of Christ*. The church builds itself in the faith as the members care for one another, show love, and generally manifest the other gifts God gives (as mentioned in [Romans 12](#) and [1 Corinthians 12](#)). Yet the church also builds itself as it reaches out to its surrounding community with the love of Christ, drawing others into the fold. God has given his church an enormous responsibility—to make disciples in every nation ([Matthew 28:18-20](#)). This involves preaching, teaching, healing, nurturing, giving, administering, building, and many other tasks. Fulfilling this command solo would be impossible. But God calls us as members of his body. No one should be a bystander, an observer. Everyone must do *the work of ministry*. Some of us can do

one task; some can do another. Together we can obey God more fully than any of us could alone. We tend to overestimate what we can do by ourselves and underestimate what we can do as a group. But as the body of Christ, we can accomplish more together than we could dream possible working by ourselves. Working together, the church can express the fullness of Christ.

4:13 Until we come to such unity in our faith and knowledge of God's Son that we will be mature and full grown in the Lord, measuring up to the full stature of Christ. ^{NLT} The word "until" indicates that the process described in **4:12** must continue until a certain end is achieved—when all believers *come to* (arrive at, attain) unity (see **Philippians 3:11**). While unity of the Spirit must be maintained (**4:3**), *unity in our faith* must be attained. The "unity of faith" means a unity of belief in Christ himself, and this belief relates intrinsically to our knowledge of him. The goal includes making a united effort to live out and proclaim this faith.

Unity in our *knowledge* refers to fuller and more complete experiential knowledge. Every believer must have a personal, intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. Paul here called him *God's Son*, showing that this knowledge includes an appropriate understanding of the new relationship with the Father that has been provided by the Son (**Romans 8:10-17**).

This unified body of believers is called to *be mature and full grown, measuring up to the full stature of Christ*. The focus is on "we" in this verse—every believer as part of the entire body. This metaphor means that the church, as Christ's body, must match the Head in growth and maturity. This does not speak of perfection (impossible in this life) but of growth—such as children growing into adults, which ties into the following advice regarding this growth. (See **Luke 2:52**, where Jesus grew "in stature.")

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Ephesians.

Life-Sharing Lesson 6 “Insanity For Christ: Own Your Potential” 1
Corinthians 12:4-11, Romans 12:3-8, Ephesians 4:11-13

1. What is one thing you know that you are or were really good at? How did/do you feel when you were/are doing it?

I am good with organizing words. I feel as though I am helping to make a difference for somebody and I'm using a gift that comes from God.

2. Do you believe that God believes, that you have something to offer to help build the church? Why?

Yes. Because God has gifted everyone with a gift and a talent to be used in the life of the church.

1 Corinthians 12:4-11

⁴There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit distributes them. ⁵There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is the same God at work. ⁷Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good. ⁸To one there is given through the Spirit a message of wisdom, to another a message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit, ⁹to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, ¹⁰to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy, to another distinguishing between spirits, to another speaking in different kinds of tongues, ^[a] and to still another the interpretation of tongues. ^[b] ¹¹All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.

Romans 12:3-8

³ For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. ⁴ For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your^[a] faith; ⁷ if it is serving, then serve; if it is teaching, then teach; ⁸ if it is to encourage, then give encouragement; if it is giving, then give generously; if it is to lead, ^[b] do it diligently; if it is to show mercy, do it cheerfully.

3. Having read the above two passages, which people in the church have been excluded by God from having a spiritual gift?

Absolutely nobody. Every believer has received a spiritual gift for the building up of the body of Christ. Even if a person is not a believer, he or she has a talent or skill that can be helpful in the life of the church. A person does not have to be saved in order to be used by God.

4. Why is it a form of insanity for 75% of the church to not be involved in any ministry in the life of the church?

It is insane because it means the members are deliberately sabotaging God's plan for a strong healthy church. They are praying for one thing, while doing all they can to make sure the prayer does not get answered. If the members are not involved in the church, the church will suffer. It's not that Satan is winning, it's the members giving the game away. It is insane to want to win while following a play book that guarantees defeat.

5. Which gift or gifts do you have right now from the above two passages? Are you being fanatical in the use of using of the gift, or are you hiding it by keeping it to yourself? Who does the gift belong to?

I have the gifts of teaching and administration. I try to use them both as effectively as I can. The gifts do not belong to me but to the body of Christ at large. When I use the gifts, others are more effectively able to grow in Christ.

6. When you filled out your service sheet this past Sunday, did you look more like a fanatic or a fair weather fan by how much you were willing to commit to do?

7. How does picking up your cross and accepting God's spiritual gift inside of you work go together?

One has to choose to exercise his/her gift whether he/she feels like it at the moment or not. You use your gift as a way of saying yes to the will of God for you at this particular time. You may desire to have another spiritual gift, but part of picking up your cross is accepting the gift that God has imparted to you to do the work of the ministry in the location that God has placed you in. It does the church no good to say what you would do if you had so and so's gift, the question is always what are you doing with the gift that God has given to you.

Ephesians 4:11-13

¹¹ So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

8. What is the purpose of those in various leadership roles and ministries in the church according to this passage in Ephesians?

The purpose of those in leadership is to prepare everybody else to do ministry work for Jesus Christ. Leaders are to equip others to use the talents and gifts God has given to them to make a difference in the lives of others and to build up the body of Christ.

9. On a scale of 1 to 10, (1 not at all, 10 completely open) how open are you to being equipped for new works of service in the church in order to build up the body of Christ.

10. What would a church of fanatics for Christ look like in terms of the members?

Every member of the church would be able to say what their spiritual gift is, and what they are doing to use it in the life of the church. Everybody would take ownership for the life and health of the church. They would be ready to fill in when there is need regardless of whether it was their turn or not.

11. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 not at all, 10 very much so), how responsible do you feel personally for the health of the church? Does your score put you in the realm of fanatic or fair weather fan?

12. What does it mean to own your potential in the life of the church?

It means to use the gifts and talents I have been given in order to make the church as strong as possible. I am to make my gifts available.

13. What's the connection between faith and owning your potential?

My faith is demonstrated by me using the gifts that I have been given. If I am not owning and using my spiritual gift, then I am not using my faith. Faith without works is dead.

14. Are you a follower or a fan of Jesus?

14 b What have you learned from this series about yourself?

15. Are you participating in the fast? What are you learning?

15b. Did you get the chance to pick up your cross this week?

15c. Did your button open a door for you to share?

15d. How are you doing with your devotions.