

Building Together, Part Two

Household of Faith

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Scribbles & Scribes Ink
6341 Shelby 150, Suite A
Bethel, MO 63434

Phone 660-284-6230

Fax 660-284-6366

Web Site Address:

www.scribblesandscribes.com



The Church

Finding Your Place in the Big Picture

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than (the blood) of Abel.

Hebrews 12:22-24

Chapter Eleven

Objective:

This lesson is designed to reveal the government of God which exists in and through the delegated authority of His Church.

The Church

Finding Your Place in the Big Picture

City Hall—Men and women receive authority delegated to them by the people. In the Church, men and women receive authority delegated to them by God. The Church is not based on democracy but on the absolute power and authority of a just and merciful God.

The Church is also referred to as the following:

Bride of Christ, Ephesians 5:22-32

Body of Christ, Ephesians 4:12
City of God, Hebrews 12:22

Flock, Acts 20:28

God's Building, First Corinthians 3:9

Household of God, Ephesians 2:19

Israel of God, Galatians 6:16

Jerusalem, Galatians 4:26

People of God, First Peter 2:10

Temple of God, First Corinthians 3:16

Mount Zion, Hebrews 12:22

Introduction:

Before the foundation of the World, God established a plan for His glory to be revealed through His people. God does everything by a pattern. He wants His pattern to show life on earth as it is in heaven. His pattern is the Church. When we see the big picture of the Church, we will see where we fit in it.

The Church is much more than one group of people meeting in a storefront on Sunday morning. It is the many-membered Body of Christ and includes all of God's people who are alive today, those who have lived in ages past, and those who are to come. Noah, the Apostle Paul, Billy Graham, you, me, and our great-grandchildren who will one day serve God are all part of the Church universal. In this study, you will notice that the universal Church is always referred to with a capital letter, because it is the Body and Person of Jesus.

The Church is something like City Hall, with the exception that it is not ruled by popular vote, but by the absolute authority of God. It is the place in the earth where His authority is delegated and carried out, always covered by His attributes of mercy, love, and justice. Throughout history, the Church has faced many testings and trials, but She has been sustained by the promise of God Himself that His Bride shall become glorious.

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven

from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper ...

... And I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God, the Almighty, and the Lamb, are its temple. And the city has no need of the sun or of the moon to shine upon it, for the glory of God has illumined it, and its lamp (is) the Lamb. And the nations shall walk by its light, and the kings of the earth shall bring their glory into it ... Revelation 21:10–11, 22–24.

God's Eternal Purpose

From before the beginning of time, God had a plan to share His Goodness with a people. The plan was instituted in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve, who walked intimately with God. But, even before man was created, the plan had been interrupted. One third of the angels in Heaven, led by Satan, had rebelled and had been hurled down from God's sight. Satan then set himself to disrupt the Kingdom God was establishing on the earth, but he was destined to fail, *Revelation 12:7-12; Luke 10:18.*

In succeeding generations, God continued to choose various men or families to carry on the plan. Noah, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua, David, and many others fulfilled the purposes of God in their generations, but still they could only present a shadow or foreshadowing of the true restoration plan that God had in mind.

The Plan Revealed

For a child will be born to us, a son will be given to us; And the government will rest on His shoulders; And His name will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Eternal Father, Prince of Peace.
Isaiah 9:6

Jesus is also the First Fruits of the Kingdom and the First Born Among Many Brethren, First Corinthians 15:20; Colossians 1:15,18; Romans 8:29.

Jesus is the Head from whom the whole Body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the Body for the building up of itself in love, Ephesians 4:15,16.

For the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the revealing of the sons of God. For we know that the whole creation groans...waiting eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our body, Romans 8:19, 22–23.

Notes

The prophets of the ages had been preaching about a spiritual kingdom which was to come — a Kingdom in which the full authority and power of God would be revealed. That Kingdom was ushered in by Jesus — Emmanuel, God with us.

Jesus Himself told the Pharisees, *the Kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Look, here' or 'There' For behold, the kingdom of God is in your midst, Luke 17:21.* He was referring to Himself, of course. He is the Kingdom of God.

But, the Kingdom is not in Jesus alone. It is also in His Body, the Church. Jesus released His life and extended His Kingdom into the Church, His chosen followers on the earth, so that God's full authority could be expressed from there. That is why it is imperative that we understand that God's command center is the Church. Not just the spiritual realm, but all the created kingdoms of the earth are under the domain of God. No one comes into a place of authority unless God allows it, *Romans 13:1.* The charge to the Church, therefore, is great.

Although God began His plan with Adam and Eve, He wants His Kingdom established in more than just a few individuals. When the first family of creation disobeyed God's command, they were thrust from His presence and faced with lives of toil and trouble ending in a physical death. They were not left hopeless, however. Even in that moment of separation, God gave Adam and Eve a promise for the future.

God cursed the serpent which had beguiled Eve, and He warned both Adam and Eve about the hard consequences of their sin. But in the midst of the curse, God hinted at a brighter day, when the seed of woman would bruise the head of the serpent. That promise

painted a picture of Satan one day being crushed underneath the power of a people who walk in God-given authority.

The promise was not for Eve. It was for her children. God required the obedience of one Man, Jesus, to atone for the disobedience of an entire race. Now God requires that the whole Church give Him absolute preeminence. The Church universal in full submission to the authority of God, through the submission of Jesus, has fulfilled the prophecy. Through the obedience of Jesus, the Kingdom was established. Through the obedience of the Church, it will be revealed to all nations.

Check Yourself

In your own words, define the universal Church.

How is the Church similar to City Hall in its function?

How does the Church function differently than City Hall?

List three scripture references that describe the Church by another name, such as the Bride or Body.



The Local Church

A House Where His Presence Will Dwell

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.

First Peter 2:9

Chapter Twelve

Objective:

The purpose of this lesson is to examine the characteristics which mark a house built for His Presence—a local church which will do the will of the Father and proclaim the excellencies of Jesus Christ who is the Head.

The Local Church

A House Where His Presence Will Dwell

Introduction:

When a family decides that it is time to buy or build a house, they design that home to fit the needs of their unique family. Certain features are more important than others, depending on the life-style of the family. Yet, the purpose of the structure is the same. It is to provide shelter, safety, and comfort for the people we love. God's House has a specific purpose, as well.

But speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him, who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by that which every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love, Ephesians 4:15-16.

If our goal is to build a local church that accurately expresses the nature of God to the dying world around us, then we must be ready to accommodate certain characteristics of such a Body.

Jesus is the Head

Jesus Christ is central and supreme in the church. That means that each member has given himself totally to the headship or lordship of Jesus Christ and is not merely seeing Him as a "personal Savior" who places no demands upon His followers. Jesus is the Chief Cornerstone of the Building, and He is our Master, *Ephesians 2:20*. Every sermon preached in the pulpit should point to that fact and every action taken by the people, individually or corporately, should come from an intimate relationship with Him.

Members of One Another

The church is not built on meetings, doctrines, religion, or rituals. It is built on relationships which are centered in Christ. We are “called out” together as a people, and our relationships must cross national, social, racial, ethnic, and economic boundaries. We must embrace every member that God saves and plants in our midst. We must see what was divided at the Tower of Babel now united at the throne of Jesus.

God did not intend that the fullness of our relationships with one another would only be expressed by staring at the back of someone’s head on Sunday morning. He does not want the relationships between shepherds and sheep to consist of a handshake on the way out the door. The first church in Jerusalem demonstrated God’s design for a daily life filled with friendships which are centered around Jesus, *Acts 2:46-47*.

This description might seem to fit a small congregation in an intimate setting. It actually describes a church of more than ten thousand members. It was too large to fit in one building and must have met in various locations. Yet the heart-to-heart, family style relationship thrived among them.

The Purpose

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven, Matthew 5:14,16.

Notes

Local churches are established in order for this scripture to be fulfilled in specific, geographical locations. The world is not peeking in the window during our Sunday services to see if the Holy Spirit is falling upon us. They are not listening at the front door to hear if prophecy is coming forth or if faith is being imparted in the preaching. Although those elements are necessary for the building up of the Body and the equipping of the saints, those experiences are not the way the Presence of God through the Holy Spirit will shine before unsaved men. He shines in our lives. In the way we handle our time, our money, and our relationships.

It is essential that the Presence of God dwell with us during corporate services in order that He can remain with us throughout the week and be evident in our good works. We must build a House that is a dwelling place for His Presence so that we can fulfill the call to our father in the faith, Abraham— a call to be a blessing to all the nations, *Genesis 22:18*.

The remaining lessons in this book will deal with various aspects of local church life. These are important issues to understand as Paul explained to Timothy... *I write so that you may know how one ought to conduct himself in the household of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and support of the truth, First Timothy 3:15.*

Check Yourself

The Church is a family. God is the Father of all, and in the church we have fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and children, Titus 2; First Timothy 5:1–2. To teach us how the family should relate and interact, the Bible lists a large number of “one anothers.” Look up the following scriptures and write down what each one says about the way we are to treat one another in the church.

Romans 12:10 —

Romans 12:16 —

Romans 14:13 —

Romans 15:7 —

First Corinthians 12:25 —

Galatians 5:13 —

Ephesians 4:32 —

Hebrews 10:24 —

First Peter 5:5 —



Church Government

Establishing the House Rules

*And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets,
and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and
teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of
service, to the building up of the body of Christ...*

Ephesians 4:11-12

Chapter Thirteen

Objective:

In order for the Body of Christ to be properly equipped, we must begin to understand the House rules. We must also learn to recognize the people God has placed in authority in the House. Because we are continually gaining new insight into the call and the work of apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, this lesson is not meant to focus so much on creating titles or positions as it is designed to help us understand the function of these ministries.

Church Government

Establishing the House Rules

Introduction:

Every household needs a head. Even in today's "modern" thinking where chores are often divided with an eye toward "equality," and domestic lines are less clearly drawn than a generation ago, someone has to bear the final responsibility for every decision. Corporate America understands that concept, and appoints a CEO to every company and a chairperson to every task-force or committee. That's because the world is following a pattern instituted by God Himself. He is absolute authority over all people, nations, and rulers — yet He has set in place delegated authority to govern His Church, just as He has established earthly rulers to govern world affairs. . . . *For there is no authority except from God, Romans 13:1.*

God has spoken clearly in His Word about government. He states specifically that leadership is necessary, and that He has delegated His own authority to certain people who are to serve in leadership. Besides these explicit declarations, God has also shown us in pictures what that kind of leadership looks like. He began with families who were led by Patriarchs, like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Those families then became nations, with elders to lead them. Eventually God called Moses, who became the spiritual leader of a Holy nation. These well-known examples are surrounded by other stories of judges, priests, kings, and prophets who exercised their God-given authority in leadership.

Authority from God

This is not a democratic process. God looks down upon the earth and selects some of those who are submitted to His authority to serve as representatives of that authority. This was a familiar concept to the officer who approached Jesus to secure healing for one of his men. He recognized the authority that Jesus held over sickness, because he, himself, was a man under authority, *Matthew 8:5-9*. Those who desire to serve God will recognize the people who carry His delegated authority. They will follow those people as they follow God. No system devised by man for choosing leadership will ever provide a satisfactory alternative for this God-choosing method, *Numbers 12:1-15; 14:1-12; 16:1-35; Mark 3:13-19; Acts 13; 14:23; 16:1-3; 26:14-18; Titus 1:5*.

New Testament Terms

The New Testament uses a variety of terms to express positions of leadership, and some of those terms are discussed in the following paragraphs.

- **Elder** — The word “elder” holds two meanings in the scriptures. The head of a family was called elder, and that referred to his chronological age as well as his position and his wisdom. The leaders of the nation of Israel (the Church) were also called elders. In Church government, the term does not necessarily relate to chronological age, *First Timothy 4:12*. It speaks of an older man, one with the spiritual maturity and experience necessary to lead a local church. This term refers to “who” the leader is.
- **Bishop or Overseer** — This term refers to the leader’s responsibility in watching over, protecting, caring for, and tending the people of God. It does not indicate a territorial, governmental position or a

form of hierarchy. Rather, it is used in the same sense as “elder,” and indicates that because of a leader’s position as an elder, he cares for God’s people as an overseer, *Titus 1:5-7; Acts 20:28*. This term seems to speak of the “position” the leader functions in.

- **Pastor or Shepherd** — This refers to one who feeds the sheep.

The terminology is an indication of “what” the leader actually does in his role as elder and overseer. Scriptures show us that these three words are interrelated. ... *take heed therefore unto yourselves and to all the flock over which the Holy Ghost made you overseers (bishops) to feed (pastor or shepherd) the church of God, Acts 20:17-28. Shepherd (pastor or feed) the flock of God which is among you, exercising oversight ... (verb form of “bishop” in the Greek) First Peter 5:2.*

- **Deacon** — This is a “servant” term in the New Testament.

However, it does not mean simply “one who waits on tables.”

Although the scriptures mention no specific functions for deacons, yet the word itself describes those who are responsible servers in caring for the church. New Testament illustrations of men like Stephen and Phillip indicate that deacons were men anointed by the Spirit and full of the Holy Ghost who preached, ministered, performed miracles, and cared for God’s people in both practical and spiritual ways. The moral, domestic, and spiritual qualifications for deacons and elders are the same, *First Timothy 3:1-10; Titus 1:5-9*. The only difference appears to be in the authority they carry in the church. Elders rule, but deacons do not govern in that capacity, *Philippians 1:1*. Another difference is that while the scriptures do not refer to female elders, the Greek word for “deacon” is used to describe Peter’s mother-in-law when she arose from her sick bed to serve Jesus and the disciples, *Mark 1:29-31*. It is also used to describe a number of other women in

the Bible. None of these women were in a place of rulership, but in an anointed area of influence and powerful ministry or service.

The Team Concept

The Bible also clearly illustrates that eldership and leadership in the church functions as a team. Every team must have a leader, and someone on the team will assume final authority and leadership. That leader, however, will be fully submitted to other members of the team. This team concept is described in the following verses:

- Elders in every church — *Acts 14:23*
- Elders in Jerusalem — *Acts 15:4-23: Acts 16:4*
- Elders of Ephesus — *Acts 20:17*
- Let the elders rule — *First Timothy 5:17*
- Call for the elders of the church — *James 5:14*
- The elders which are among you — *First Peter 5:1*
- Ordain elders in every city — *Titus 1:5-11*
- Obey them that rule — *Hebrews 13:17*

The Five-Fold Gifts

Paul speaks in Ephesians about the ministry gifts that Jesus left with His disciples at the time of His ascension into Heaven. Ephesians four describes apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, who have been given to equip the church. Their primary function is to train, enable, motivate, discipline, and instruct the church to carry out the work of ministry of building up the Body of Christ, *Ephesians 4:11-12*. Paul says that these gifts have been given until the Church reaches the stature God intends for Her. Since we do not believe that the Church has yet become the perfect Bride, we

Notes

should fully expect to see all of these gifts still operating today. Every Elder in a local church should be either an apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor, or teacher. However, every person who is called to one of the five-fold offices is not necessarily an elder.

The following titles are not given for the purpose of recognizing a specific leader and his call, but to help explain the need for leadership and to show the variety of ways in which leadership will function. In fact, these ministries will overlap one another at various times. Although each leader may “do the work of” one or more of these gifts, they will not operate primarily in more than one, *Ephesians 1:1; Galatians 1:1; Second Timothy 1:11; First Peter 1:1; 5:1.*

- **Apostle** — “One who is sent,” *Acts 14:23; Ephesians 4:11; First Corinthians 12:28.* Apostolic ministry typically functions in these areas: Appointing and training leaders; establishing churches; strengthening existing churches; serving and strengthening leaders; formulating doctrine; serving churches. Although the apostle will function in positional authority, like a father, during the process of establishing churches and leadership, he will eventually move to a place of influential authority, more like a grandfather, leaving the church in the hands of local leadership.
- **Prophet** — “bubble up and gush forth,” *Ephesians 2:20; Acts 15:32; Ephesians 3:3-5; Acts 11:28; 13:1-2.* A prophet is God’s mouthpiece, speaking on His behalf, and will generally provide the following functions: Works alongside apostles in foundational ministry; receives revelation to direct, warn, inform, edify, exhort, and console God’s people; sometimes receive revelation to foretell future events. It is possible for others in the church to prophesy without holding the ascension gift office of “prophet.”
- **Evangelist** — “one who proclaims good news,” *Acts 6:5; 8:26-40;*

21:8. Phillip's ministry is the best scriptural example of this gift at work. A servant who was able to preach the message of salvation to the masses, or to one lone man on a desert road, Phillip was continually bringing the unsaved in from the fringes of the Body of Christ and making them a part of the Church. He was not a one-man show, though. He called Peter and John to come and help him in Samaria, for instance. A true evangelist is one who not only carries the gift himself, but is also able to impart and teach other members of the Body how to function in evangelism. That is essential equipment for an evangelist, because we are all called to proclaim the good news.

- **Pastor** — “one who feeds and cares for the sheep,” *Ezekiel 34:12-16*. The traditional understanding of a “pastor” is that he is the guy who runs the church — at least as much as the deacon board allows. In our man-made concepts of leadership, we have assigned the word “pastor” to men whose actual gifting may be as teachers, prophets, apostles, or evangelists. We have then expected that one-man pastor to become a five-fold gift to the local church!

The concept of team leadership is more in line with scriptural examples. The pastor or pastors of a local church are men who have a heart for the sheep the way an evangelist has a heart for the lost. Following the example of Jesus, *John 10:11-14*, the pastor lays his life down for the sheep, and knows them by name. Pastoring is a relationship, not a job description. A true pastor will know not only the names of his individual sheep, but also their specific needs, their besetting sins, and their current stage of growth in God. He will laugh with them, cry with them, and play with their children. He will rejoice over their victories and weep over them in

Notes

prayer. Because the call to pastor involves such intimate friendship with the people under his care, no man can truly pastor a mega-church alone. Large congregations require a team of pastors who function under the leadership of the head pastor.

- **Teacher** — “one who is skilled and gifted in the exposition of the Word of God.” Although all those who function in a five-fold gift should be able to teach, and many members of the Body will teach at specific times, the teacher carries a specific anointing to teach. When he steps forward in prayer and calls for Jesus as Teacher to descend upon a meeting, an anointing for understanding enters the room in an almost tangible way, *John 20:16*. The teacher then puts forth the Word of God in a manner that people can easily grasp and apply to their own lives. He follows the example of Jesus, who is the greatest Teacher who ever lived.

Jesus Christ is also the chief apostle, prophet, evangelist, and pastor — and He is a servant of all. He has appointed people to govern His Church, and He has given them gifts to enable them to fulfill their call. The Church, in turn, recognizes these callings in specific men and women and responds accordingly. Besides those mentioned here, the Church also needs gifted psalmists, musicians, helps, administrations, hospitality, givers, those who show mercy, and much more. People may function in the grace of a gift without holding the office or authority. The Church is not to be governed by the systems that earthly organizations are governed by. The Church belongs to God, and it is His government, His gifts, and His callings which we acknowledge.

Check Yourself

Look at the list of “qualifications for elders” in Titus 1:6-9 and list the necessary characteristics in a man called by God to exercise authority in the House.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____
6. _____
7. _____
8. _____
9. _____
10. _____
11. _____
12. _____
13. _____
14. _____



Church Membership

Taking Your Place at the Table

God makes a home for the lonely.

Psalm 68:6

Chapter Fourteen

Objective:

This lesson is designed to clear up some of the common misunderstandings about what church membership actually is. It is also meant to encourage new believers to become active members of a local church, with all the rights, privileges, and responsibilities.

Church Membership

Taking Your Place at the Table

Introduction:

We are not born into the family of God in the same way that we are born into natural families. Yet, God has called each one of us to leave our solitary life-style and become a member of the particular “family” or local church that He has in mind for us. It is a spiritual joining, but it has physical marks which can be seen and recognized.

At some point in the early history of the Church, the question of membership became confused. Today, views on the subject cover a wide range of opinions. In some nations, children become official members of the State Church when they are born and registered as citizens, just as they become a member of their natural family. Some local churches take that same stance, baptizing infants into the church at birth. Other people consider themselves members of a church because their name is on the roll — even though they attend only on Easter or Christmas Eve.

On the opposite side, some people believe that any attempt to “register” believers or organize a “membership” is too worldly or unscriptural, and so they shun the whole idea. In order to clear up some of those misconceptions, we simply have to remember who the Church really is.

The Universal Church

Every believer throughout the ages who has been known by God is a part of the Universal Church. Moses is a member, and so is Abraham. You and I are members with them, and so are any of our great-grandchildren who will one day bow their knee and become

obedient to the faith. It is a timeless generation, not bound by laws of nature.

Hebrews chapter twelve refers to the universal Church when it speaks of the “great cloud of witnesses” who surround us, cheering us on in our race. This is the Church of Jesus Christ in its entirety — past, present, and future.

On the Local Level

Within this universal Church, local expressions of the Body of Christ meet in various geographical locations. The apostle Paul wrote to specific groups of people in specific places when he addressed his letters to the churches at Corinth, Ephesus, Galatia, and so on.

The local church is a group of called-out people who have been given authority from God to express His life in a city or region. Church membership, then, must be considered an issue of the local church and must be viewed in that context.

Early Church Records

Both the Old and the New Testament indicate that even in the earliest days of the Church, there was some method of numbering and identifying God’s people. God told Moses to number the people in the wilderness, *Numbers 1:1-2*, and that began a pattern. Throughout the history of the nation of Israel, it was always apparent who was a member and who was not.

Jesus set the example for us in the New Testament by choosing twelve apostles and recording their names. Later he chose seventy

more, *Luke 10:1*. Someone took time to count and record that over five-hundred of the brethren were present when Jesus ascended into Heaven, and somewhere their names may have been recorded, *First Corinthians 15:6*.

It is obvious that the scriptures contain evidence of some kind of accounting of membership. In the United States, legal requirements stipulate that proper records of membership be kept in relation to church funds, holding of property, taxes, and so forth. This cannot be an invisible, mystical method of record keeping. It must be tangible.

Qualifications for Membership

Despite the best efforts of man to prove otherwise, the Church is not an institution to be joined the way we join a community service organization, nor is it something we can attain through natural birth. The Church is made up of those ... *who were born not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God, John 1:13*.

This is a membership with requirements, however, and the primary requirements are the same as those for salvation. As Peter declared on the Day of Pentecost, we must *repent, and let each of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, Acts 2:38*. All who are drawn by the Spirit of God and confess Jesus as their Savior enter the kingdom of God and become members of the Universal Church. Evidence of that membership is the main requirement for membership in a local church.

On the local scale, this membership is practical and can be seen. The Book of Acts is an excellent instruction manual for church

membership, and it details the rights, responsibilities, and privileges of those *who have been added to the Church, Acts 2:47*.

Membership in Action

Anyone who wishes to become a true member of a specific local church must consider the following things.

- **Vision** — Members must have an understanding of the vision God has given the primary leader, and they must express a willingness to flow in that vision. Moses had a clear vision of where God wanted to take His people, but hardened hearts prevented many of the people from following and supporting that vision. As a result, they died in the wilderness and never entered the Promised Land.
- **Oversight** — Membership requires that we recognize the God-given authority of the eldership of that local church and that we be willing to submit ourselves to them for our development and growth. Ephesians four makes it clear that leaders are given for the sake of equipping the saints. According to the Book of Hebrews, the leaders of the House keep watch over the souls of the members as ones who will give an account. The scriptures admonish members, *therefore, to let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you, Hebrews 13:17*.
- **Relationships** — Church membership, quite simply, is the fruit of giving our lives to one another. The model found in the Book of Acts is still the heart of friendship that God intends for us today. It is His plan that we be *continually devoting ourselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer, Acts*

2:42. It is also in God's plan that the sheep and the shepherds be true friends. Jesus says ... *I know my sheep, and am known by My own, John 10:14*. It is right that the leaders of a local church be close friends together and have close friendships among the other members as well. The members of a body must interact with one another to function properly, *First Corinthians 12*.

- **Instruction** — Leaders in the local church are given direct commission to teach and instruct. That responsibility also rests upon individual members of the church. We are all to be ... *imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises, Hebrews 6:12*.
- **Support** — *Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, Acts 2:44*. In the early church, the members took care of one another. This action was not the result of some legalistic teaching; it was simply the heartfelt response of those who had been touched by God. Before long, men full of the Spirit were appointed to administrate the giving and the distribution of money and goods "to those who had need." Financial and material support of the church flows from the heart to heart relationships the members feel for one another and for the leadership.

In Conclusion

Members of a local church, then, believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and are therefore members of the universal Body of Christ. Each individual member is committed to a specific group of believers who meet regularly in a local setting — and is submitted to God's delegated authority operating within that group. A member considers the local church as the storehouse to which he carries his

tithes and offerings and from which he receives protection, counsel, teaching, fellowship, encouragement, correction, and practical support.

Once a believer has decided to commit himself to all the responsibilities of membership in a local church, he will also receive all the benefits and blessings that membership produces. He becomes a member of the family, born not of blood or the will of man, but of God.

Check Yourself

Read Acts 2:42-47. Using that passage as a model, list some specific ways you can begin to implement these principles into your own life.



Church Discipline

Receiving the Father's Correction

Chapter Fifteen

Objective:

Because this area of church life has been the focus of much discussion and dissension, this lesson has been designed to present a clear, concise picture of godly discipline as it is to be exercised within the context of the local church.

Church Discipline

Receiving the Father's Correction

Introduction:

Discipline is not a pleasant word. In fact, the Bible itself says that *all discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness, Hebrews 12:11*. Within a family, chaos would quickly reign if rules were not established and enforced through discipline. The same is true for God's family. He has established the rules, which we find in the Bible, and He has delegated authority on the earth to help administer His discipline when needed. The purpose of discipline in the family and in the Church is always for the sake of restoration and a return to *the peaceful fruit of righteousness*.

Discipline is necessary. The scriptures make that clear, and personal experience will bear witness. If you don't think so, spend an evening with five children whose parents don't believe in "interfering with their free expression."

Yet, even people who understand discipline in their own homes can tend to see it as a form of manipulation or control in the church. Some go so far as to suggest that church discipline borders on cultism. But, more commonly, church members express their dissension in more subtle comments like, "I don't think they should have handled it like that," or "something about it just doesn't feel right."

Those who coddle such thoughts would have been in deep trouble if they had been a member of the church in Ephesus when Paul told them not to *participate in the unfruitful deeds of darkness*,

but instead even expose them, Ephesians 5:11. They would have been similarly upset when Paul told Timothy to deliver Hymenaeus and Alexander over to Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme, *First Timothy 1:18-20.*

The Father's Heart in Discipline

God is not standing in heaven with a thunder bolt in one hand waiting to zap anyone who disobeys a commandment or curses a brother. Peter may have had that kind of picture in mind when he asked Jesus how many times to forgive an offending brother — suggesting that seven times might be generous. Jesus replied that Peter should forgive seventy times seven, *Matthew 18:21-35.*

In another gospel account, Jesus says *if your brother sins against you, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him. And if he sins against you seven times a day, and returns to you seven times saying, "I repent," forgive him, Luke 17:3-4.* These passages clearly illustrate that instead of a vengeful God who is watching for an opportunity to strike, we serve a Father whose heart is longsuffering, merciful, and forgiving.

Sometimes, however, the most merciful thing the Father can do is discipline His children. In fact, the Bible says that *he who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him diligently, Proverbs, 13:24.*

The Purpose of Discipline

The purpose of discipline is two-fold, and it is well illustrated by the actions of the apostle Paul in his relationship with the church at Corinth. When Paul learns that one of the brothers is living in

sexual immorality, he tells the church to remove the immoral brother because *a little leaven leavens the whole lump of dough*, *First Corinthians 5:6*.

In this passage, Paul is pointing out that discipline is necessary for the protection of the other members of the house. If the brother is allowed to continue in his sin with no consequences, the weak or immature members will be tempted to follow his example, and sin will reign.

The primary purpose of discipline, though, is explained in the previous verse, when Paul says that he has decided to *deliver this one over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*, *First Corinthians 5:5*.

In his next letter to the church at Corinth, Paul reveals that the discipline has accomplished the desired result. Referring to one who has been under the Lord's discipline and has now repented, Paul tells the church to restore him — *to forgive and comfort him, lest somehow such a one be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow*, *Second Corinthians 2:7*.

James reaffirms that instruction when he writes, *for judgment is without mercy to the one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgement*, *James 2:13*. The church, then, is required by God to discipline the erring believer, yet the responsibility to mercifully restore the repentant one is equally as great.

The Process of Discipline

Church discipline is a process, which takes place in stages, allowing the full work of the Holy Spirit to take place in the believer's heart and allowing time for him to find the gift of repentance. The following process is outlined in Titus 3:10–11 and Matthew 18.

1. If your brother sins, go to him and reprove him in private. The scriptures are clear that this must be done in a right attitude by those who are spiritual, *Galatians 6:1*. At this point, it is not necessary to reveal the sin to “a few close friends, for the sake of prayer.” This is a private matter and may be easily resolved. If so, you will have won a brother.
2. If he fails to listen, go again and take one or two witnesses with you, so that every fact may be affirmed. This is not a “good cop/bad cop scene” or an opportunity for gossip. The offending brother is still a brother rather than an enemy, and the purpose is still restoration without embarrassment or unnecessary discomfort to the offender.
3. If he refuses to listen to this small delegation, the time for discomfort has come. Tell it to the church. That does not mean you are to stand up during Sunday morning announcements and reveal the man’s sin. Rather, you are to go to the elders of the church and report what has been done and what attempts have been made for restoration. At that point, the matter becomes one for the shepherds to deal with.
4. If he refuses to listen to the leadership of the church, they will decide how to exercise the necessary discipline and how to make that discipline known to the church and what the steps for restoration will be.

Throughout this entire process, the goal of restoration remains.

Brethren, if anyone among you strays from the truth, and one turns him back, let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins, James 5:19–20.

Check Yourself

In First Corinthians 5:9, Paul is careful to point out that his command to “not associate with the immoral one” does not mean we are to avoid the sinners of this world. On the contrary, we are to bring our light into their darkness, which God will judge. The “immoral one” mentioned here is a brother, a professor of the faith who is living a life of unrepentant sin, and the church is to judge him. Paul then lists specific sins which require discipline. Use your Bible and a dictionary to define the following terms from this passage.

1. Covetous —
2. Idolater —
3. Reviler —
4. Drunkard —
5. Swindler (Extortionist) —

What scripture passages would you use to turn the brother from these specific sins?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.



Praise and Worship

**Celebrating the
Father's Love**

Chapter Sixteen

Objective:

This lesson is designed to encourage all disciples to approach the throne of God as His children and to give Him the worship and praise that is due.

Praise and Worship

Celebrating the Father's Love

Introduction

Small children have an immediate response when their father comes home from work. Even before they see his face or hear his voice, they seem to know that he has entered the house. The very atmosphere seems to change, and immediately, the children rush to greet him with shouts of glee. They dance around his feet, pull on his sleeves, and smother him with kisses — and that is praise. A little later, when things calm down, the children are ready to climb up on their father's lap, lay their heads against his chest, and listen to his words. That is worship.

Entire volumes have been written on the subject of praise and worship, and all of them fall short, because the subject is too big to be contained in one book. Although we tend to think of the Psalms as the “praise book” or hymnal of the Bible, the Bible is actually filled from cover-to-cover with praise and worship. It is depicted in the lives which are recorded there, and it is commanded in the teachings of Jesus and the disciples.

The importance of worship is not hidden from the enemy camp. When Satan was tempting Jesus in the wilderness, he offered Jesus all the kingdoms of the world and their glory if He would simply fall down and worship Satan, *Matthew 4:8-11*. When we worship someone or something, the worship establishes a relationship between us. Worship brings us into submission, and we are influenced, directed, and ruled by that to which we submit. So, Satan would have been willing to give Jesus the world, knowing that

Jesus would become just like him, and God's plans would be destroyed.

Who We Worship

We live in a day and age when worship has been diverted from God and given to everything from cylinders of glass to convicted felons who play a mean guitar. Even those of us who deny such outward idols often fall into the habit of worshipping ourselves.

This worship in wrong places is demonstrated in a variety of ways — in how we spend our money, what we do with our time, who comes up in our conversations, where we focus our attention, and a myriad of other ways. Any of those areas diverted to something besides God will become worship, and the writer of the Psalms has a warning for us about that.

Referring to those who make gods of silver and gold, the writer says that those who trust these gods will soon become like them — *having mouths, but they cannot speak; eyes, but they cannot see; ears, but they cannot hear... Psalm 115:4-8.*

But, the Bible does make it abundantly clear Who we are to worship. During his amazing revelations, the Apostle John came face-to-face with a magnificent angel who had come straight from the presence of God, and immediately John fell down to worship. But the angel, who was also a created being designed by God for a specific purpose, stopped John, saying, *See that you do not do that; I am a fellow servant of yours and of your brethren the prophets and of those who heed the words of this book; Worship God, Revelation 22:9.*

The Effects of Worship

All worship belongs to God. He deserves it; He already owns it; It is His. By worshipping Him we are simply giving voice and heart to something that has already belonged to God before the foundation of the world. And, amazing things take place when we worship.

We live in an unseen realm, where spiritual forces are at work around us in ways we seldom understand. We do feel the effects of the war going on around us, though, and the Bible demonstrates that praise and worship are weapons in our arsenal. When King Jehoshaphat and his people went out against the strength of three combined enemy armies, they sent the singers first. The worshippers went ahead of the army and sang praises to God all the way. When they reached the field of battle, the enemy armies had already been destroyed, and the spoil was waiting, just as God had promised, *Second Chronicles 20*.

King David was also a worshipper. From the early days as a shepherd boy singing alone in the hills, through his kingly reign in Jerusalem when he danced like a madman in the streets to welcome the presence of God, David recognized that worship was the key to finding God's heart. And he was a man who was passionate for knowing God's heart. The relationship between David and God was one of intimate friendship, born of worship, *Psalms 30*.

When We Are To Worship

Some religions appoint specific hours, days, and, dates for worship. The Christian faith defines a specific time for worship, too

— always. *At all times, continually, while I have my being, every day, as long as I live* — are common terms in reference to worship in the scriptures. Our lives are to be a worship unto God.

How We Worship

This issue has been the subject of much controversy in the Church. Yet the answer is quite simple. We worship God with everything we are or ever hope to be. Several specific ways to worship outwardly are detailed in the scriptures, and they include the following.

- By lifting our hands. This is a universal signal from children who are longing to be held by their parents. It is also a sign of surrender, *Psalm 28:2; 63:3-4; 141:2; 134:2; First Timothy 2:8*.
- By clapping our hands. Hands are like rhythm instruments created by God, and should be used to praise Him, *Psalm 47:1, 98:8*.
- With musical instruments. The psalmists refer to trumpets, lutes, harps, and cymbals as instruments of praise in Old Testament times. Today we can add electronic keyboards and digital synthesizers to the list of tools of praise, *Psalm 150:3-6*.
- With singing. Our voices were the first instruments of praise created, and we are commanded to have the high praises of God upon our lips. We praise Him in the Spirit, with new songs, prophecy, prayer, etc... *Psalm 149:6, Colossians 3:16, Ephesians 5:19*.
- By shouting. The word “hallelujah” means to cry aloud or break out into a cry. The psalms give instruction for shouting unto God with a voice of triumph and shouting joyfully to our God, *Psalm 47:1; 66:1, 81:1*.

Notes

- By standing. This is a common means of respect for those who deserve honor and a sign of alertness among army ranks. The Bible refers to those who praise and worship God, *standing by night in the house of the Lord, Psalm 134:1; 135:2.*
- Dancing. David was so overcome by worship when the ark returned to Jerusalem that his dancing display horrified his wife, (she was cursed with barrenness thereafter) and after crossing the Red Sea Miriam led a dance that swept an entire nation into worship, *Second Samuel 6:1-16, Exodus 15:20-21.*
- Bowing or kneeling. Those who love God are instructed to *come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord our Maker, Psalm 95:6.*

Worship is a part of our priestly ministry. It releases things in the heavenlies, draws us closer to the Father, and makes a dramatic change in our lives. We are living in a day when Jesus' words to the woman at the well are being fulfilled in His Church. We are learning what it means to worship *in spirit and in truth, John 4:24.*

Check Yourself

Worship is the dividing line for many Christians. We may be willing to confess Him with our mouth, and follow His teachings in our life, but until we begin to worship Him in spirit and in truth, we have not become His true disciples. Look at the following people in the Bible and list one example of their worship. Style may differ from culture to culture, but spirit and truth remain the same.

Abraham:

Joshua:

King David:

Paul:



Stewardship

Providing for the Needs of the House

*For you have been bought with a price:
therefore glorify God in your body.*

I Corinthians 6:20

Chapter Seventeen

Objective:

This lesson is designed to help God's children see clearly that our money, our time, our families, and our very lives belong to God. It is also meant to help us learn to better administrate God's Kingdom by being good stewards of His money, His time, His family, His talents and His Church.

Stewardship

Providing for the Needs of the House

Introduction

When parents teach their children how to handle money, they commonly divide the child's allowance into categories. They tell the child to set aside so much for tithe, so much for savings, and so much for expenses. The remaining change is then tucked into the child's hand. Consequently, he learns early in life to call that money "MINE!" But the Bible teaches a different concept. According to the scriptures, nothing is mine, and everything is God's.

We are servants. Every member of the human race is born as a slave to the prince of darkness, who is Satan, and many spend years toiling for him with no hope of redemption. But Jesus has set up another Household. He paid the price of His own life to purchase the children of God and bring them into His kingdom as sons and daughters. Now, according to the Apostle Paul, *we are bond-servants to Christ, Philippians 1:1*.

That picture simply illustrates the fact that we are not owners of this world's goods, nor even of our lives. God owns us; He owns everything, and He has graciously trusted us as stewards, or administrators, of that which He has created.

This stewardship is not an optional accompaniment to life in the Kingdom. It is a duty, and God does not look lightly upon those who refuse to fulfill it. In fact, the parables indicate that such a one will be "cast into the outer darkness," *Matthew 25:14-30*.

On the other hand, God has also promised reward to those who steward His affairs well. *Honor the Lord from your wealth, and from*

the first of all your produce; so your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will overflow with new wine, Proverbs 3:9-10. Not only does God promise rewards in this life to the faithful steward, but ultimately those who follow His example and instructions will be promoted to places of honor at His side, where they will rule and reign with Him forever, *Hebrews 12:1-3; Revelation 3:21;22:5.*

What We Are To Steward

The Bible gives specific examples of the goods we are to manage, and they include the following.

- Our lives. *He Himself gives to all life and breath and all things; Acts 17:25; Deuteronomy 30:20.*
- Our abilities. *Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights... James 1:17.*
- Our time. *The fear of the Lord prolongs days... Proverbs 10:27.*
- Our possessions. *For all things come from Thee, and from Thy hand we have given Thee, First Chronicles 29:14.*
- Our finances. *The Lord will... bless all the work of your hand... The Lord will make you the head, not the tail... Deuteronomy 28:12-13.*

What a Good Steward Looks Like

Because the things entrusted to us are so valuable, a good steward must prove to be faithful, steadfast, dedicated, dependable, and worthy of trust, *First Corinthians 4:1-2.* We can only accomplish those traits by obeying the Word of God and keeping His commands.

Obedience is also vital to proper stewardship. Once again, following God's Word is the only path to obedience, and He promises that if you carefully obey the voice of the Lord your God ... *(He) will bless you just as He promised you, Deuteronomy 15:5,6.*

In order to obey and to be faithful, we must trust God absolutely. We must *believe that He is and that He is a rewarder of those who seek Him, Hebrews 11:6.* We must put our hope in the Word of God itself, which says, *'Test me now in this,' says the Lord of hosts, 'if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows,' Malachi 3:10.*

Tithes and Offerings

Jacob made a vow, saying, ... *'This stone which I have set up as a pillar will be God's House... and of all that thou dost give me I will surely give a tenth to Thee,' Genesis 28:21-22.* This tenth is called the "tithe," and it is a principle laid down in the Old Testament and supported in the New Testament. Jesus scolds the Pharisees because even though they have paid their tithe, they have neglected other matters of the law, *Matthew 23:23.*

This giving of the first-fruits of our income to the Lord is an act of worship, and it signifies that everything we have belongs to God. It is not sufficient to offer God ten percent, pay our bills, and then hoard the remaining cash in our hand as "our money." God is the source of all our strength to work, all our abilities and gifts, and all of our income — therefore, all the income we produce belongs to Him. Beyond the tithe, we must inquire of Him concerning other offerings or uses for "His money."

When we obey God in this area of tithe and offering, we are declaring that we believe He is a God who keeps His promises. Our reverence and love for Him will then grow as we see Him honor His Word, *Deuteronomy 14:22-23*.

Purpose of the Tithe

The Bible states that tithes and offerings are to be brought into the storehouse, the local church, *Malachi 3:10*. There they provide for the practical needs of the House of God. Salaries, building maintenance, mission outreach, special projects, and brotherly care are all funded from this source under the direction of the local church leadership. Bringing our resources to the storehouse indicates not only our trust in God, but also our faith in the leadership to hear God and properly distribute His resources for the advancement of the Kingdom.

Many people believe that they can not afford to tithe, due to a heavy debt load or unexpected expenses. On the contrary, tithing during financial difficulty gives God a chance to show His mighty power and fulfill His Word. It is an expression of faith in God's ability to intervene supernaturally in difficult, or even impossible, circumstances. Therefore, when we come to God with our tithe or offering, we are to come cheerfully, willingly, generously, and with a loving and thankful heart, *Second Corinthians 8:2; 9:7-13*.

Check Yourself

The following attitudes often hinder our stewardship of God's resources. In the space below each statement, write a sentence or two explaining what is wrong with the statement. Include scriptural support. If you hear yourself speaking in any of the statements — repent, and begin to give again.

1. It may not work.
2. My time is too limited to give it to the Church.
3. After I pay the bills, there is nothing left.
4. God doesn't need or want my money because He owns the cattle on a thousand hills.
5. I will give a bundle to the church when God blesses me with a raise or the winning ticket in the Reader's Digest Sweepstakes.



Prayer

Calling Home

Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Philippians 4:6-7

Chapter Eighteen

Objective:

This lesson is designed to illustrate prayer as the only form of communication between children of God and our Father. It is hoped that the nature of prayer and the necessity of prayer will become evident, and that prayer itself will take proper place in our lives.

Prayer

Calling Home

Introduction:

Communication is essential to relationships. When boy meets girl, communication takes place before courtship can begin. And communication must continue if the marriage is to thrive. As the family grows, so do the levels of communication. Infants are comforted by the sound of their mother's voice, and children calm down when Dad says the storm will blow over. Eventually we learn that no matter how old we get nor how prestigious our job; no matter how big our bank account or how exciting our career — sometimes we just need to call home

Prayer is not words. Prayer is relationship. Our personal relationships are not based on a series of poetic phrases, nor are they held together because we take time each day to quote to one another our wish-lists. Friendships and relationships involve time, conversation, activity, quiet, and experiences that words can never measure. Our relationship with God is much the same, and our communication with Him through prayer will be just as diversified.

Importance of Prayer

Prayer is not an option. In fact, it is a commandment, and we are commanded to do it without ceasing, *Romans 1:9*. That means that we are never finished praying; it is a constant part of our lives. Nor is it reserved for the pastor and the elders or the intercessory prayer team. *All men (and women, and children) everywhere are to pray, First Timothy 2:8*. Jesus Himself provided our example in prayer. Even in the busyness of a life which was surrounded by

multitudes of people asking to be healed, fed, and taught, Jesus found time for the most important activity of the day. ...*He Himself would (often) slip away to the wilderness and pray, Luke 5:16.*

Aspects of Prayer

Prayer takes many forms and involves a number of attitudes and actions. Among those aspects of prayer, the following are included:

- **Confession.** We acknowledge our sinful, fallen condition before God and confess our need of Him. This attitude should be our constant companion, *Nehemiah 1:6–7*. The model for confession is not the pharisee who said, “thank God I am not a Publican.” The model is the Publican, who said, “have mercy on me, a sinner,” *Luke 18:11-13*. Confession also involves repentance and forgiveness. Here is where our attitude toward our brother will affect our relationship with our Father, *Matthew 5:23–24*.
- **Worship.** Worship is the appropriate response to our understanding of who we are and who God is. Such a discovery will send us to our knees in adoration and humble praise, *Psalms 34:1-3; 100; 145*.
- **Meditation.** This is the place where we simply enjoy God’s company. We think, reflect, ponder, and wait quietly before Him. In meditation, we gain God’s perspective on our relationship with Him and on every area of our lives. Possibly, all other aspects of prayer should be birthed out of this time with God.
- **Petition.** There is a place for making our requests known to God. Petition involves personal needs and desires. If we have meditated on God and are in right relationship with Him, then even our petitions will come straight from His heart. *If you abide in Me, and*

My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you, John 15:7.

- **Thanksgiving.** Like worship, this is the place where we remember God's goodness, faithfulness, and lovingkindness to us. We express that gratitude in a number of ways, and all of them are prayer, *First Thessalonians 5:18.*
- **Intercession.** This is a form of petition for others. It is guided and aided by the Holy Spirit, who sometimes speaks through us *for we do not know how to pray as we should, but the Spirit Himself intercedes for (us) with groanings too deep for words, Romans 8:26.*
- **Prayer in the Spirit.** The Baptism of the Holy Spirit empowers us in prayer. *For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays, but my mind is unfruitful. What is (the outcome) then? I shall pray with the spirit and I shall pray with the mind also; I shall sing with the spirit and I shall sing with the mind also, First Corinthians 14:14–15.*

Prayer and Fasting

Fasting is the act of voluntarily abstaining from food, and sometimes even water, for a specific period of time in order to seek God with special intensity. It is not an attempt to twist God's arm, nor to appear holy before men, but rather it is a vehicle to help direct our hearts and minds toward Him without distraction, *Isaiah 58.*

We should fast when we have been directed by the Spirit of God, *Luke 4:1-2*, or when we know individually that we need to, *Matthew 6:16-18*. We will also fast at times when the entire local church is called to fast for special occasions, meetings, decisions, or needs, *Joel 1:14; Acts 13:1-4.*

The Bible records some astounding results when people have prayed and fasted for specific situations. Some examples include:

- A nation was delivered from death, *Esther 4*.
- The city of Ninevah was saved from divine wrath, *Jonah 2-3*.
- Demon spirits were cast out, *Matthew 17:14-21*.
- Elders were ordained, *Acts 14:23*.
- The will of the Lord was revealed, *Acts 9:9-15*.

Instructions for Prayer

Since prayer is the voice of our relationship with God, it is vital to our existence. It should never become a boring ritual, something we “have to do.” Unfortunately, prayer is one of the most unnatural things we can do. Our carnal man is never interested in praying, because it is a totally spiritual experience. We will never be stirred on the natural level to pray — only on the spiritual level. In order to obey the command and keep our life with God alive, we must subdue our flesh and bend our will. The natural realm is no help at all. No matter how soft the lights, sweet the music, and quiet the room, we will never pray unless the Spirit rules.

We can not fool God. Selfish prayers, or look-how-many-big-words-I-know prayers will never put us in touch with our Creator. Real prayer is done in humility and honesty. The Bible teaches that we should be in an attitude of that kind of prayer always — praying “on-the-hoof” as Ruth Bell Graham describes it. But, scripture also illustrates that we should have scheduled times of regular prayer, *Luke 18:1; Acts 3:1; Daniel 6:10*. The Old Testament saints did. The disciples did. And most importantly of all, so did Jesus. *But He Himself would (often) slip away to the wilderness and pray, Luke 5:16*. Let's do the same.

Check Yourself

Look up the following scriptures to discover the hindrances to prayer that we need to remove from our lives.

1. James 4:1-4

Hindrance:

2. Matthew 6:5-8

Hindrance:

3. Psalm 138:6

Hindrance:

4. Matthew 5:23,24

Hindrance:

5. Hebrews 12:15-17

Hindrance:

6. James 1:5-7

Hindrance:

7. First Peter 3:7

Hindrance



Evangelism

Inviting Friends for Dinner

Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

Matthew 28:19–20

Chapter Nineteen

Objective:

The goal of this lesson is to destroy the legalistic fear which seems to surround evangelism today, and replace it with an understanding that true evangelism is friendship. It is introducing a new friend to your Elder Brother, Whom you love, and knowing that your friend will love Him, too.

Evangelism

Inviting Friends for Dinner

Introduction:

Children who come from a stable home, where loving relationships exist, always seem to multiply at dinner time. Everybody wants to bring a friend home to share the supper fun — and pretty soon, friends start showing up even when they aren't invited! Before long, these guests become more like members of the family, and before you know it, they are bringing friends home for supper, too!

Because we have been born of our father Adam and are made from corruptible seed, mankind can never discover the plan of salvation on our own. We are, in fact, dead in sin, *Ephesians 2:1,5*. Because Adam disobeyed God, he was separated from His Creator, and that sin passed on to all his offspring, bringing the human race heartache, misery, and spiritual blindness. We have been separated from God for so long that we have become accustomed to the “unnatural” state, and we actually love the darkness rather than the light, *John 3:19*.

But God did not leave us there. He took the initiative to bring us back into fellowship with Himself by sending Jesus Christ to be the Head of a brand new race. Those who have believed in their heart, repented of their sin, and confessed with their mouth are born of incorruptible seed, new creatures in Christ, *Romans 10:9; Galatians 3:26-29*.

That is the “Good News.” And we, His Church, carry the awesome responsibility of broadcasting it to the dying world. *How*

then shall they call upon Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? Romans 10:14. God has chosen His Church as the instrument through which the good news shall come to the suffering masses. When we see the multitude through Jesus' eyes, we are filled with His compassion and are compelled to tell them, "He is the Way!"

Every believer has the commission and the privilege to spread the word. The gospel is a people-to-people message — simple, yet powerful. Those who have been touched by His Grace are more than willing to obey the command, *freely you have received, now freely give, Matthew 10:8, First Peter 2:9.*

We hold the secret of life, and we are delighted to give it away to those we love. But, in order to do so, we must understand some basic assurances that we as believers have.

- All who believe are enabled through Christ to testify of Him, *Acts 1:8*. "I won't know what to say," is no longer an excuse, because the Holy Spirit Himself has promised to speak through us.
- We do not have to be intellectual giants with persuasive words, *First Corinthians 1:26,27*. The message that Jesus saves is simple and persuasive on its own. All we have to do is tell our own story.
- The work of grace that God has done in us will be our motivation to carry the news wherever we go, *Acts 8:4*.

The Good News

When we spread the news, we are really telling people several specific facts. Regardless of the method we use or the words we

choose, we are saying the following things to a person who has repented from sin and submitted to the Lordship of Jesus:

- Bad news—you are a sinner. Good news—Jesus saves.
- You are now made righteous in Christ, *Romans 4:5*.
- You are no longer under condemnation, *Romans 8:1-2*.
- You are now being conformed into the image of God, *Romans 8:28-30*.
- You now have peace with God, *Romans 5:1*.
- You now have access to the Father, *Romans 5:2*.

For those who have been living in darkness and death, this is very good news indeed. Anyone who has been eating the refuse from the table of sin will be overjoyed to join the Father and His family at the banqueting table.

Evangelists in the Bible

When we step out in faith to fulfill this call, we are in good company. Men and women down through the ages have led the way for us to follow in evangelism. Jesus devoted the primary thrust of His ministry to evangelism, *Luke 4:18, 43; Matthew 11:5; Luke 8:1*; and He sent out His disciples into the same ministry, *Luke 9:6*.

The early church recognized its responsibility in evangelism, *Acts 5:42; 8:12; 13:32*. And the apostle Paul was ready to preach the gospel anywhere, any time, *Romans 1:15; First Peter 3:15*. He gave special commendation to the churches at Rome and Thessalonica for their efforts to evangelize their communities and the areas beyond, *Romans 1:8, First Thessalonians 1:8*.

The role of the five-fold gift of the Evangelist is not to win the world on his own. His role is to equip, teach, and train the saints to

do the work of evangelism. The evangelist belongs to the church, just as the other five-fold gifts do. We have each been filled with the Holy Spirit and are empowered to spread the good news with our words, our lives, and our friendships. That is how we become fellow-workers with Christ and fulfill the Great Commission of preaching salvation through Christ and making disciples of all men, *Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:18-20; First Corinthians 3:8,9.*

Check Yourself

Who told you? Write a short essay describing how you first heard the Good News and who told you.



Family Night

Taking it Home to Your House

*For this reason, I bow my knees before the Father,
from whom every family in heaven and on earth
derives its name ...*

Ephesians 3:14–15

Chapter Twenty

Objective:

This lesson is designed to help each individual member find their proper role and position in the family and each family find their proper place in the church.

Family Night

Taking it Home to Your House

Introduction:

Joseph was brought up by his stepmother, and Moses was raised in a foster home. King David's son was rebellious, and Peter lived with his mother-in-law. Almost every family listed in the Bible could be labeled as "dysfunctional" according to the guidelines of our society. Yet they all represent the relational plan of God on the earth. He designed the family, and He has a plan for how it should work. Each of these people went on to fulfill the purposes of God in their generation, and their less-than-perfect families were often the vehicle by which that work was done.

God has designed the family as a picture of his intended relationship with His own people, and He refers to His Church as the family of God. But, because we have allowed our own picture of family and of church to be twisted by the world, both have become weak and ineffective in many instances.

The key to strong churches is not strong families. That is putting the order in reverse. Rather, the key to strong families is a strong Church. Adam and Eve's children did not go bad until they broke fellowship with God and left the garden — their local church.

Within the family, God established an order that is perfect and patterned after the Church. To maintain order, a leader must be assigned, and in the family, God has given that role to the husband.

The Husband's Role

For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church ... Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ also loved the

church and gave Himself up for her ... Ephesians 5:23,25.

Note the key words in this scripture: “head” and “love.” Husbands are charged to follow Christ’s example as the head by loving to the point of sacrifice. To do that, he will need to understand some basic principles, such as the following:

The Call to Lead

- **A man in authority, must be under authority.** Any authority a man carries in his home is derived from his own submission to Jesus Christ. This line of authority is demonstrated by the Roman centurion who spoke with Jesus and was described as having “great faith,” *Matthew 8:8-10*. Remembering this will prevent a man from becoming a domineering dictator who exercises his authority with harshness.
- **He understands God’s plan for order and then maintains that order in the home.** When a man follows God’s direction to “lead with diligence,” *Romans 12:8*, his family has the potential to become all that God intends.
- **He leads his family just as Jesus the Great Shepherd leads His people.** Leading implies that the husband has a definite direction and definite goals, which requires vision. Without vision or direction, a man’s family will perish or cast off restraint, *Proverbs 29:18*, and he will be a blind guide, *Matthew 15:14*. Leading is also a people-centered activity and cannot be based on rules for the sake of rules. That attitude can lead to “man being made for the Sabbath” instead of “the Sabbath being made for man,” *Mark 2:27*.

- **He recognizes the difference between authority and value.** His position as head does not make the husband the most valuable member of the family. All members have equal value in God's eyes, they simply have different roles. In the partnership of two spiritually-equal human beings, the man bears the responsibility to lead the partnership in a God-glorifying direction.

The Call to Love

- **The husband is giving.** He must exercise an agape or selfless kind of love, which is based on a daily decision, not a feeling. The kind of love that sacrifices unto death comes from a man who makes the choice to love his wife. Authority arises from such love.
- **Following the example of the Servant-King, the husband serves.** A man who humbles himself to serve others, including his wife and children, will motivate them to follow the example of Christ in their home, in their church, and in the world.
- **He provides both physical and spiritual provision.** He functions as the priest of the home, interceding for and instructing his family. Physical needs will be met when he has sought the Kingdom first, *Matthew 6:33*. As the provider-priest, the husband's goal is to see his family become all that the Church is to be — glorious, without spot or wrinkle, holy and without blemish, sanctified, and cleansed, *Ephesians 5:26–27*.
- **He leaves and cleaves,** *Genesis 2:24,25*. Husbands and wives are to become one, just as Jesus and the Church are one. Failure by either husband or wife to leave homes, parents, and single lives behind will result in wrecked marriages and devastated families.

- **He treats his wife the way Jesus treats His Bride.** That includes nourishing her, cherishing her, dwelling with her with understanding, and giving her honor, *First Peter 3:7*.

The Role of the Wife

Wives, be subject to your own husbands, as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife, as Christ also is the head of the church, He Himself being the Savior of the body. But as the church is subject to Christ, so also the wives ought to be to their husbands in everything, Ephesians 5:22-24.

“Respect” and “honor” are the key words in the matter of submission. Wives are instructed throughout scripture to submit to their husbands, *Titus 2:5; First Peter 3:1; Colossians 3:18*. Yet, even Godly women have often seen submission in a negative light. That has happened because we do not clearly understand the term. Submission does not indicate that a wife is to give up independent thought or view her husband as God. Nor is she to refrain from giving input as a trusted advisor or councilor would give to a ruler.

The Call to Submit

- **Submission is a heart attitude.** It is an inner quality of gentleness that affirms the leadership of the husband, *First Peter 3:4*.
- **Submission is also absolute, although obedience is not.** Only God deserves our unqualified obedience. If someone in a position of delegated authority, including a husband or a parent, commands something which constitutes sin, there is no obligation to obey. It is possible to disobey a command and continue to remain submitted in heart attitude as David did with King Saul.

- **Submission requires a choice, not merely an action.** It is quite possible for a woman to remain silent and follow her husband's decision while harboring a heart of rebellion. True submission means that a wife exercises her own experience and wisdom to bring counsel to a situation. Then she trusts God to guide her husband in the right decision — and to clean up the mess if he gets it wrong! A woman who chooses submission is saying that she trusts God.
- **True submission brings women the freedom to function as God intended and to become all that He desires.**

The Call To Respect

Respect is closely linked to submission, because it is difficult to submit to someone you do not respect. Like submission, respect is a choice, and it can be cultivated.

- **She sees her husband the way God sees him.** No one knows a man's flaws and foibles better than the woman who lives with him each day, and that knowledge can breed disdain. Sarah must have faced that with Abraham, but she chose to see him as the man of promise rather than the man who failed to give her a son.
- **While it is much easier to respect a godly husband than an ungodly one, God doesn't seem to make that a prerequisite.** In fact, He says that a husband who "does not obey the Word" can be won without a word by his wife's submissive, chaste, and respectful behavior, *First Peter 3:1-2*.

Along with these two areas, wives are also called to be pure, discreet, diligent in rearing children and keeping the home, astute in business, and worthy of their husband's trust, *Titus 2:4-5; Proverbs 31:28,29*.

Such a woman possesses many talents and abilities, and she becomes a blessing to her children, her husband, and the Church.

The Role of Parents

Behold, children are a gift of the Lord; The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one's youth. How blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them; They shall not be ashamed, when they speak with their enemies in the gate, Psalm 127:3-5.

Your wife shall be like a fruitful vine, within your house, your children like olive plants around your table. Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed who fears the Lord, Psalm 128:3-4.

God expects the same order, love, security, and stability for children in a natural family that He expects in His own Home, the Church. The line of authority continues to come from the Head, which is Christ, through the father, who is the head of the house. However, parents function as a team in rearing children.

The Call To Love

Children are the Lord's reward, Psalm 127:3. One of the greatest privileges God has given to men and women is to allow them to bring forth children after His own likeness. To do so is to fill a home with joy. Parents also have a responsibility to love and esteem their children and to want them the way God wants and loves His children. Jesus wanted children to be around Him, and He used them as an example of pure faith, *Matthew 18:2-5*. In our efforts to train them up in Godliness, we must never forget the call to love and delight in the pure joy of having children.

The Call To Train

God's Word is to abide in the heart of parents, and they are to teach that word diligently and continually to their children. When they sit, lie, stand, or walk parents are to be teaching children the ways of God, *Deuteronomy 6:7*. Each generation is responsible for teaching the Word of the Lord to the generation which follows behind them, *Psalms 78:1-7*.

All children are born into sin and inherit a corrupting influence which drives them to further sin and worldly lusts. Parents are responsible for teaching the Word of God, instilling it into the hearts of their children. The power of the Holy Spirit, however, causes a regeneration and cleansing from sin, *James 1:21*.

One admonition to parents is that they not "provoke their children to anger," *Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21*. Although this may have practical applications, such as teasing or inappropriate discipline, children are also provoked to anger when parents fail to fulfill their call to bring children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.

The Call To Discipline

Discipline is a vital part of the training process, but it is much more than mere punishment. Discipline brings a change in behavior so that training in righteousness will result. The Bible states clearly that *foolishness is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him, Proverbs 22:15*.

Much controversy surrounds spanking, and parents should make sure they approach spanking with a right heart. For most children and most behaviors other forms of discipline work well. A time-out

from activities, a few words of correction, or a clear consequence such as “no *Veggie Tales* videos if you hit the other little boys in children’s church today,” will bring the desired results.

Spanking should be reserved for open acts of rebellion or for times when children refuse to repent or change a behavior. Make sure that you are setting rules and consequences that your child can really follow. Set him up for success, not failure.

When you decide that spanking is the only course of action to take, follow these guidelines. Wait until you are calm. Explain to the child why you are spanking. Follow the spanking immediately with hugs and words of love. Make sure your child knows that you are disciplining because you love him.

As they grow older, children will learn that sin causes pain, just as their disobedience caused physical pain when they were spanked. Discipline and training must produce more than an outward change of behavior. Because God is interested in the heart, it is more important to discipline attitudes than actions. While it is necessary to require children to conform to rules and commands of God, the ultimate goal is changed hearts, which will obey God without parental intervention. Parents enforcing rules in the home will point children to Jesus who will enable them to fulfill His call.

The Role of Children

The key words for children are “honor” and “obey.” First, children are to honor their parents, *Ephesians 6:2–3*. That includes parents who are not living godly lives. Children in such situations must seek God and find a way to honor their parent without following the parent’s example.

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Next, children are to obey their parents in the Lord and in all things, *Ephesians 6:1; Colossians 3:20*. Again, the rules for submission and obedience must be understood here. Submission is an attitude of the heart, while obedience is an action. It is possible to submit to an ungodly parent in your heart without obeying the ungodly commands of that parent. Children who fulfill this role will be blessed with the promise that it will go well with them, and they will inherit a long life.

As families become integrated into the life of their local church, these roles will be supported, defined, and complemented; and each individual family member will become all that God has designed them to be.

Check Yourself

Using Psalm 127 and 128, fill in the blanks below with the names of your own spouse, children, or parents.

Behold, _____ are/is a gift of the LORD; The fruit of the womb is a reward. Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, So are the children of one's youth.

How blessed is _____ whose quiver is full of them; He/she shall not be ashamed, When He/she speaks with his/her enemies in the gate.

How blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in His ways. When you shall eat of the fruit of your hands, You will be happy and it will be well with you.

_____ shall be like a fruitful vine, Within your house, _____ like olive plants around your table.

Behold, for thus shall the man be blessed who fears the LORD.

The LORD bless _____ from Zion, and may you see the prosperity of Jerusalem all the days of your life.

Indeed, may you see _____'s children.

Peace be upon Israel!



House to House

Fellowshipping With the Family

And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God, and having favor with all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved.

Acts 2:46-47

Chapter Twenty-One

Objective:

The goal of this lesson is to reinforce our need for fellowship with one another, and with God.

House to House

Fellowshipping with the Family

Introduction:

God is a relational being. The Trinity itself is a relationship — Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. So what we have learned about the church and have applied to our own families will be useless unless we put it into practice with the brothers, sister, mothers, and fathers who make up the family of God. Our Christianity is fruitful when we practice it from house to house.

God sets the solitary in families, Psalm 68:6. From the beginning of creation, God knew that it was not good for man to dwell alone. That fact has not changed. We were created to be a people in fellowship with one another. We were made to be friends. We are to be devoted to one another in brotherly love, honoring one another above ourselves, *Romans 12:10*.

That truth is illustrated in the lives of many saints in the Bible, such as David and Jonathan, *First Samuel 20:17*, Paul and the Ephesian Elders, *Acts 20:37–38*, and Jesus and His disciples, *John 15:12*. It has been suggested that one reason Thomas was so doubtful about the resurrection of Christ was because he had separated himself from the fellowship of the brothers and was not present when Jesus appeared to them, *John 20:24*.

Devoted To Fellowship

And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer, Acts 2:42.

Fellowship goes far beyond casual conversation at the back of the church on Sunday, and it is much more than lazy afternoon chats over tea. Fellowship penetrates to the depths of the soul, causing us to belong to those we are in fellowship with. The light of this kind of fellowship then shines into the community. They can see that we belong to one another and to God.

Because of the proof given by this ministry they will glorify God for your obedience to your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for the liberality of your contribution to them and to all, Second Corinthians 9:13.

The most visible fellowship takes place in our daily lives, not our special activities. When ten families show up to help the new neighbors move in, fellowship is demonstrated. When young men gather to paint a widow's house on Saturday afternoon, everyone on the block sees fellowship. When the youth group washes dishes in the kitchen following a Ladies' Meeting, they are learning about the heart of fellowship. It is from those times of giving ourselves to God together that deep conversations and hilarious fun will arise.

This scripture in Acts uses the word "devote" to describe the attitude of the first church toward fellowship, teaching, and prayer. To devote oneself indicates the sacrifice of time, energy, money, talents, and abilities for the sake of the cause. In this case, the cause is fellowship with God and with the brethren. Relationships cost. They are hard work. But no other light will shine brighter in the world of darkness than true fellowship among the saints.

Distortions of the Teaching

Some believers have taken the scriptures in the second chapter of Acts to mean that it is wrong to own a car or have private possessions, and that our fellowship should take place in a commune-style setting. That is not the point being made. Rather, the scriptures are pointing to our heart attitude toward the things we are stewards over. Ananias and Sapphira, *Acts 5:1-11*, felt that they owned certain things. Instead of counting their land as God's and being willing to give it up if someone had a need, they attempted to deceive the Holy Spirit Himself. It was not the fact that they kept money for private needs that caused their death. It was the lie. Likewise, it is not wrong to have a quiet family dinner with no other guests, as long as our hearts are ready at any instant to set an extra plate and invite someone else to come in.

Two Kinds of Fellowship

Fellowship takes place on two different planes — vertical and horizontal. Vertical fellowship refers to our relationship with God, *First John 1:3; First Corinthians 1:9; Philippians 2:1*. That fellowship flows back and forth from heaven to earth and involves prayer, praise, worship, and study of the Word of God.

Horizontal fellowship flows back and forth between brothers and sisters. It is also expressed through such things as prayer and worship, but it also includes the physical expressions of breaking bread together, gathering to learn more of the apostles doctrines, showing hospitality, and ministering to one another's needs, *Romans 12:13; Hebrews 13:16; Acts 2:45; 4:35*. It is also great fun!

The Bible gives some specific directions for putting this horizontal fellowship into action. We are to treat one another with love, and love fits the following parameters:

- Love is patient, love is kind, (and) is not jealous
- Love does not brag (and) is not arrogant
- Love does not act unbecomingly
- Love does not seek its own
- Love is not provoked
- Love does not take into account a wrong (suffered)
- Love does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth
- Love bears all things
- Love believes all things
- Love hopes all things
- Love endures all things
- Love never fails, *First Corinthians 13:4-8*.

Putting It To Work

One good way to facilitate this kind of horizontal fellowship involves small group meetings during the week. These groups may meet in various homes, and they set an atmosphere where all members of the family can become acquainted and take an active part in one another's lives. These meetings are the perfect place for young disciples to learn to pray, prophesy, teach, exhort, and worship in a safe environment, where mistakes are accepted and growth is expected. Although our corporate meetings should be seen as perfecting meetings, not perfect meetings, these small groups are

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less intimidating to someone who has never moved in the gifts of the Spirit before.

Whether our fellowship takes place in a Wednesday night home group, a Saturday morning work project, or a Sunday afternoon picnic, it is clear from the scriptures that we are to put our faith in practice day-to-day and house-to-house. Then the world will see God and His people in true fellowship, and they will hunger for the same.

Home group leaders function as under-shepherds for the flock of God. Some people have even compared them to sheep dogs, who live right in the midst of the sheep. They are so closely involved in the lives of the people that they sense quickly when a lamb is in danger or when disease is spreading. These leaders carry a vital role in making sure that all the sheep are eating in green pastures and drinking pure water.

Home group leaders always have a pastor's heart, and they love the church with passion and zeal. Like the centurion who understood lines of authority, they are submitted to the local eldership and look to that team for specific vision and direction. A home group leader is the first line of defense and the first voice of counsel for his or her home group members. Through their friendships with one another and with their people, home group leaders become some of the strongest pillars in each local church.

Check Yourself

How relational are you? Take this quick survey to decide where you fit on the friendship and fellowship scale. Circle the answer which most accurately describes your life.

1. During the last three months, I have invited friends to my house to eat:

- a. At least once a week
- b. Two or three times
- c. Never or almost never

2. During the last three months, I have eaten a meal at a friend's home:

- a. At least once a week
- b. Two or three times
- c. Never or almost never

3. On Sunday mornings, when I look at members of the congregation:

- a. I know each one by name, and could probably name their favorite color, movie, or childhood memory.
- b. I know most of their names and could at least put the right kids with their parents.
- c. I can't identify the visitors as visitors.

4. It would be fair to say that I:

- a. Know what color the bathroom is in the home of every family in the church.
- b. Know where most people in my homegroup live and have been inside the door of most of their homes at some time.
- c. Know that most of the people in the church must live in the same city that I do.

Check Yourself

5. As a member of a small group within the church I do (or would if we had small groups):

- a. Attend every single meeting and arrive half an hour early to help.
- b. Attend faithfully, and call the leader if I can't come for some reason.
- c. Miss three weeks out of four, or arrive at least half an hour late.

6. During the week:

- a. I make a point of calling at least ten people on the phone list, just to check in.
- b. Make contact with someone from the church at least two or three times.
- c. Watch t.v., mow the grass, take care of my family, and forget that I know those people from church.

Rate Yourself. If you circled mostly A's, you either come from a very small church, or you are too busy to have a life! Mostly B's indicate that you have a good grasp on relationships and probably live a fairly balanced life. Mostly C's indicate that either you are new to the family, have a serious hermit-thing going, or don't have a clue about horizontal relationships. Locate someone in the church who circled A's and find out what is happening in the church this week. Then sign on and join in.