

EXPOSED

LIFE ON THE INSIDE

Exposed: Life on the Inside Daily Devotionals

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Published by LifePoint Church

Smyrna, Tennessee

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615-459-3311

lifepointchurch.org

Printed in the United States of America

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HOW TO HAVE A QUIET TIME

We live in a day of noise and busyness. That's why having a daily quiet time or devotion is so important. In fact, it's critical to living a Christ-centered life. So, for this study, we have provided five daily devotionals for each week. Here are some tips to help you get started.

1. **Begin with the right attitude.** As you begin, take a minute to pray. Ask God to show you anything in your life that is preventing you from hearing from Him. Ask Him to open your eyes and ears to see and hear what He wants to show you (Psalm 119:18).
2. **Be ready to obey.** Sometimes God will show you things that are difficult to deal with. Maybe it's a weakness in your life. Maybe it's something He's asking you to do. Whatever it is, listen and respond!
3. **Select a specific time.** If you don't set a specific time to meet with God, someone or something else will take His place. There is no perfect time — just whenever you are at your best. Start by setting aside 15 minutes. As you get more comfortable, add more time. Remember, the important thing is quality, not quantity.
4. **Set a specific place.** Jesus had a specific place He would go to spend time with the Father. Why? He wanted to get away from the noise and busyness of life to devote all of Himself to His relationship with the Father.
5. **Gather your resources.** We recommend a journal and an ESV Study Bible. If you're ready for more, see other resources on page 5.
6. **Don't make it legalistic.** The enemy hates the fact that you are making this a priority. He will try everything to get you off track. Don't let him. Be careful, however, to avoid having a quiet time “just to check it off the list.”
7. **Don't give up** or feel guilty if you miss a day. That's exactly what the enemy wants. Just pick back up where you can.

LUKE STUDY RESOURCES

If you would like to take your exploration of scripture to greater heights, we suggest these resources.

1. **Monergism.com** This site is used often by Pat and our other teaching pastors. It's great if you're really ready to dive deep.
2. **ESV Study Bible** We recommend this highly as a companion to your daily devotional time. Its study notes are comprehensive yet user-friendly.
3. **Mars Hill Church** Mark Driscoll, lead pastor of Mars Hill in Seattle, has created some terrific resources on Luke's gospel. They can be found at **marshillchurch.org/media/luke**.
4. **NIV Life Application Commentary (Zondervan)** This resource by Darrell L. Bock provides extensive notes on each passage in Luke's gospel. We like it because it helps you understand how this gospel can lead you to live a Christ-centered life.
5. **Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary (B&H)** This dictionary explains many of the words, topics, customs and traditions in the Bible. There are other great dictionaries out there. This one rises to the top, in our opinion.
6. **The Strongest NIV Exhaustive Concordance (Zondervan)** Many Bibles have a shorter concordance. An exhaustive concordance lists every word used in the Bible and where it can be found.
7. **Rick Warren's Bible Study Methods (Zondervan)** This resource is a must-have for anyone who wants to take personal Bible study to the next level. It teaches 12 different methods for studying scripture on your own.

If you have any questions or would like to meet with a pastor to help you in your personal Bible study, please contact the church office at 615-459-3311 or email info@lifepointchurch.org.

FOLLOWERS CHOSEN – MANY SURPRISED

Session 1

Notes:

Things to Pray For This Week:

My Next Steps:

BLESSED ON THE INSIDE

“And he came down with them and stood on a level place, with a great crowd of his disciples and a great multitude of people from all Judea and Jerusalem and the seacoast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him and to be healed of their diseases. And those who were troubled with unclean spirits were cured. And all the crowd sought to touch him, for power came out from him and healed them all.” Luke 6:17-19

For further study: 1 Samuel 16

On a low, level plain among the mountains of Judea, Jesus stood with His disciples. Thousands of people surrounded them, some hoping for physical healing, others that the Teacher would free a loved one from the grip of an evil spirit. No one left disappointed, “for power came out from him and healed them all” (Luke 6:19). Their interaction with Jesus was all they hoped it would be; but for those who really listened, it was even more.

In the book of Luke we find a portion of Jesus' words to His followers at that meeting. The first portion of His sermon is recorded as “the Beatitudes” and uses two specific terms in referring to two types of people: those who are “blessed” and those who bring “woe” upon themselves. The “blessed” are those who live daily by grace and are happy because of it. They are blessed in that they have the approval of God, though they may never see a physical reward for their commitment until after death. Those we are to “woe” or to mourn are the ones who live their days within the moment, enjoying the good things of life without giving thought to the needs of others or to their own futures.

It may be hard to tell a Blessed from a Woe-worthy. But as God said to Samuel, “Man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). It really makes no difference how you look. It's all about what's inside.

Prayer focus

What's inside you? Are you one of the blessed, walking daily aware of God's grace? Do you allow yourself to be satisfied with the life He has given you? Can you honestly say that you are happy in every situation because His grace is sufficient? Spend some time considering what is keeping you from being blessed and ask God to deliver you from bringing woe upon yourself.

POOR, YET RICH!

*“Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. ...
But woe to you who are rich, for you have received your consolation.” (Luke 6:20, 24)*

For further study: Luke 18:9-14

Nobody likes a tax collector. Consider the affection you hold for the IRS. Now suppose that instead of the friendly chap from H&R Block, you're face-to-desk with a slick-haired creature who decides what percentage of your yearly income will find its way into his purse ... and how much will actually wind up in the government's coffers. See there. Now you don't like him either.

In Luke 18 Jesus used His disciples' loathing for the local tax collector to illustrate the concept of “blessed are the poor.” He told of a tax collector and a Pharisee who came to the temple to pray. The Pharisee lifted his hands to heaven and loudly thanked God that he was better than other men, especially the tax collector hiding in the corner. Meanwhile that same tax collector quietly bowed his head and whispered a prayer for mercy, knowing he did not deserve the grace he daily received.

You may well ask, “What's wrong with having money?” The answer is, “nothing!” In the original Greek, the word for “poor” means “one who has nothing, who is completely empty.” The point Jesus was making here is that He blesses the person who recognizes that without Christ nothing he has is worth having. A Woe-worthy person believes he is sufficient within himself. His own works supply all he needs. It's not about the stuff; it's about the heart.

Prayer focus

In order to become a Blessed, you must realize that rewards you earn yourself don't last any longer than a funeral. Take a general inventory of the things you have. Can you honestly say that if it all disappeared, you would still know you are blessed? If not, ask God to help you empty yourself of everything but Him — and be a Blessed.

COME HUNGRY!

*“Blessed are you who are hungry now, for you shall be satisfied. ...
Woe to you who are full now, for you shall be hungry.” (Luke 6:21a, 25a)*

For further study: Luke 12:17-19

“We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights.” The Declaration of Independence was written by men who knew what it was like to hunger for something, men so desperate for freedom and justice that they were willing to do whatever it took, including going to war against the most powerful nation in the world.

Luke 12 tells the story of a man who knew what it was like to hunger for things. Lots of things. In fact, he had so many “things” that he ran out of places to keep them. Now, this is typically the point where a person holds a yard sale or loads up a camel and heads to the local Goodwill Stall. Not this guy. He actually tore down his storehouses and built larger ones just so he could collect more things. God peered through the stacks of rubbish and said, “You fraud! Tonight you’re going to die. Then who’s going to get all this junk?”

A Blessed also knows what it’s like to hunger. Physical hunger can drive a man to do almost anything. A true hunger for God drives him to give sacrificially, to rise early for prayer and study, to skip movie night with the guys when their choice brings God no honor. A Woe-worthy clings to his music, his jokes, his computer or his magazines filled with images that build walls and tear down relationships.

Prayer focus

What are you hungry for? Power and position? Fame? A bigger house, a fancier car or a new girlfriend? Knowledge and education? Parenthood? Maybe it’s time for you to write a declaration of your own. Ask God to show you anything in your life that means more to you than your need for Him and for the courage to let it go if He asks you to.

HE WHO LAUGHS LAST ...

“Blessed are you who weep now, for you shall laugh. ... Woe to you who laugh now, for you shall mourn and weep.” (Luke 6:21b, 25b)

For further study: Read Luke 15:11-32; Philippians 4:8

I’ll bet you’ve never smelled a pig farm. There’s not enough Old Spice in the world to cover up the stench of a hog pen. Imagine, then, living with a few dozen putrid porkers, sleeping near the pen and pulling scraps of rotten food from a trough as you fight starvation.

Jesus told a story about a boy who did just that (Luke 15:11-32). He didn’t start out that way. He was raised in a good home, but he just couldn’t tune out the call of the world. Their music, entertainment, flashy parties and gaudy lifestyles looked like so much fun.

As soon as he was old enough, the boy took his inheritance and left home. He was going to finally have some laughs. And laugh he did — until his money ran out. Then laughing turned to weeping as he saw what he had become: a penniless, hopeless, friendless pig herder.

A Blessed is careful with his life. He constantly is reminded by looking at the world that he is no better than anyone else, but through the grace of Christ Jesus he is cleansed of the mud in which he once wallowed. A Woe-worthy doesn’t realize the danger; or, even worse, he doesn’t believe it really matters.

But it does matter. Because it’s not so easy to laugh with a mouth full of pig slop.

Prayer focus

What do you find funny? Take a good look at your three favorite movies, television shows, comedians and musicians. Now put them to the Philippians 4:8 Pig Slop Test. Are they true? Are they honorable? Just? Pure? Lovely? Commendable? Excellent? Worthy of praise? If not, then you’re wallowing. What do you need to change in order to leave the pig pen?

WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

“Blessed are you when people hate you and when they exclude you and revile you and spurn your name as evil, on account of the Son of Man! ... Woe to you, when all people speak well of you, for so their fathers did to the false prophets.” (Luke 6:22, 26)

For further study: Matthew 10:16-33

Have you ever been left out, mocked in public, rejected? Have you ever felt like no one really understood you? Why were you treated this way? Were “they” uncomfortable with someone like you being there?

Awesome! You must have been doing something right.

There is no better illustration of this principle than Jesus. He was hated by the religious, insulted by royalty, rejected by the masses and misunderstood by His own students. He was ridiculed, insulted, lied about and killed. Since His death His words have been twisted and used to excuse heinous crimes. Yet no person has ever lived who was as true, as honest, as trustworthy and as steadfast as Jesus of Nazareth. Sure, He was God, but in the flesh of a man He showed us what it meant to endure persecution for the sake of truth.

Matthew 10:17-33 warns of what a Blessed can expect. You see, the Blessed get on people’s nerves. They choose not to go places where they will be put in the path of sin. Woe-worthies go with the flow, sometimes using “religious” excuses like, “I wouldn’t want people to think Christians can’t have any fun!”

Jesus laughed, sang, ate and slept. He was 100 percent human, yet He did not sin. And He left us specific instructions for avoiding places and situations that would lead us to sinful thoughts and actions. A Blessed knows this and finds joy within the parameters He set for them.

You don’t always have to break out of the box. Sometimes the best place to be is inside.

Prayer focus

What about you? Are you the heart of the party, or do you strive for the heart of God? Make a list of close friends; then list some people you feel may not enjoy your company. Ask God to show you whether you are making enough people uncomfortable.

DO-GOODER GOES TOO FAR

Session 2

Notes:

Things to Pray For This Week:

My Next Steps:

LOVE YOUR ENEMIES

“But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you. To one who strikes you on the cheek, offer the other also, and from one who takes away your cloak do not withhold your tunic either.” Luke 6:27-29

For further study: Romans 5:6-11

Why is it so hard to be kind when people are unkind to you? Why is our default setting on “push back” when we are pushed? And why did Jesus command us to do something that doesn’t come to us naturally?

He commanded this so we would have to depend on Him. When we seek Him with all our hearts (Jeremiah 29:13), God provides the strength to do what needs to be done, whether it is easy or natural or whatever.

Jesus Himself modeled this concept for us. He prayed to His Father, often in the morning. His relationship with the Father gave Him the strength to do what didn’t humanly come naturally, like not combating the soldier who struck Him on the cheek. Or asking the Father to forgive those who were killing Him. Or dying on the cross while we were sinners.

What does loving your enemies look like in your world? Is it giving grace to the coworker who left you out of the big meeting? Is it confronting and speaking the truth — but speaking it in love — to the neighbor who lied about you? Is it working on your marriage after you thought all hope had gone and you actually had regarded your spouse as “the enemy”?

Whatever your “enemy situation” is, Christ is there to help you do what He has commanded. Loving your enemy can be a tough pill to swallow, but He has promised to be with us as we are obedient to Him.

Remember, with Him it’s all possible.

Prayer focus

What is your enemy situation? Ask God for wisdom to not just tolerate, but to actually show love to your enemy.

LIVING IN GIVING MODE

“Give to everyone who begs from you, and from one who takes away your goods do not demand them back. And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them.” Luke 6:30-31

For further study: 2 Corinthians 9:6-15

Giving is at the heart of a Christ-centered life. It can be inconvenient, uncomfortable and challenging to say the least. Yet Jesus directs us to live our lives in “giving mode.” Acts 20:35 reminds us that Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” Second Corinthians 9:7 advises us that “God loves a cheerful giver.”

Why did God establish giving as a clear mark of a Christ follower? Why is it so important to Him that we have this giving spirit?

- *Giving is not human nature.* Maintaining a giving lifestyle is not the norm. People are naturally takers. We're selfish. Giving will be noticed by others, providing the opportunity to give the Lord glory should others ask you why you give. Giving to others cheerfully is one way of being salt and light (influence) in this world.

- *Giving reflects God's nature.* Our Creator has an amazing giving spirit. John 3:16 tells us that He loved the world so much that He *gave* His Son. Paul compels husbands in Ephesians 5:25 to love their wives “as Christ loved the church and *gave* himself up for her” (italics added).

When Christ calls us to follow Him, He calls us to stand out from the world, to be different. We are called to reflect Him and not the world because the world needs Him. Having a giving spirit will reflect that difference, placing us in prime position to be His voice and influence in this fallen world.

Prayer focus

Ask God to bring to mind someone to whom you can give something today. Whether it is a small or large gift, a favor or a compliment, give it!

ABOVE AND BEYOND

“If you love those who love you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what benefit is that to you? For even sinners do the same. And if you lend to those from whom you expect to receive, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, to get back the same amount.” Luke 6:32-35

For further study: Matthew 5:43-47

I was on a flight to Florida recently. Just after the landing the announcer with a quirky sense of humor said, “Hey, let’s give our pilot a big hand for a safe landing!” A few applauded while the rest of us looked awkwardly at each other. It was as if we were asking ourselves, “Is this out of the ordinary? Isn’t a safe landing what is supposed to happen? Isn’t that his job? What’s the big deal?”

When the minimal expectation is reached, there is little to celebrate. Jesus is saying “big deal” to our lending only to the most secure sources and loving those who love us. Doing that which is easy to do — doing good to those who treat us well — should be done. But it is only the minimum. There is so much more for us as followers of Christ to do.

Jesus calls us to go above and beyond — far beyond — the minimum. As we do so in His power, we will be Christlike, for He went so far above and so far beyond the norm for us.

Christ didn’t live a life that “just got by.” There is no hint of underachievement here. As He modeled for us, so should we live our lives.

Ask God today to make you sensitive to those “above and beyond situations” in your life. They are all around us. Let Him open your eyes to how you can be Christ to an unlovable world today.

Prayer focus

Thank God throughout the day for going so far beyond the minimum in providing us the abundant life.

DO THE ABNORMAL

“But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return, and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, for he is kind to the ungrateful and the evil.” Luke 6:35

For further study: Matthew 3:13-17; Mark 9:7

Loving your enemy. Doing good. Lending without ever expecting to get repaid. These things do not come automatically to us, nor are they easy.

As Jesus summarizes this passage, He tells us to do the abnormal. This can be particularly painful when He refers to our bank account. Jesus is going for the jugular of our selfishness. Our first thoughts might be something like, “Hey, this is my purchasing power He is telling me to give away! He is toying with my status symbol for crying out loud!”

In Luke 18 Jesus went eye to eye with a rich and powerful man who was close to following Him. Jesus told the man to sell all he had and the treasure would come later. Eye to eye with Jesus, the man blinked. Then he cried, knowing he couldn’t part with his stuff.

Jesus essentially tells us the same thing. Give or lend even though it might not come back. The reward will come later, and it will be great.

Such a lifestyle requires a dependence on the Lord and much faith. Dependence is necessary because living an abnormal life cannot be done without Him. Faith is necessary to believe that what you give up will be surpassed by the unseen reward ahead.

Being recognized as a son or daughter of the Most High is part of that greater reward. “Hey, that’s my kid!” God seems to say, not unlike His response to Jesus just after He was baptized. The Spirit came down, heaven opened up and the Father proudly proclaimed, “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” (Matthew 3:17).

Yes, the reward will be great when we view things of this world as the Lord instructs us, beginning with being identified as His child.

Prayer focus

Luke says the Most High is kind to the ungrateful and the evil. Ask God for the mind of Christ today so you can view — and treat — the ungrateful and evil as He does.

ACT LIKE YOUR FATHER

“Be merciful, even as your Father is merciful.” Luke 6:36

For further study: Luke 10:25-37; 11:1-4

This whole idea of loving your enemy, turning the other cheek, going the extra mile — it's all about destroying the “fairness doctrine.” Fair would be to give the other person what he deserves. To do unto others exactly what they do to you. An eye for an eye kind of attitude. Yet fair would be for us to spend eternity away from the holy God. Jesus' death certainly wasn't fair, but He did it anyway.

Jesus turns the fairness doctrine upside down. He introduces the concept of mercy to our world and challenges, even commands, us to implement it in our way of life. His mercy admonition is found throughout His teachings.

In the Good Samaritan parable the one who showed mercy was the one described as obedient to God. The Samaritan was loving his neighbor even though he was his enemy at the time.

In the model prayer Jesus tells us “and forgive us our sins, for we ourselves forgive everyone who is indebted to us” (Luke 11:4). That's not fair for sure! When nailed to the cross, Jesus had mercy on His enemies by asking the Father to forgive them. What's fair about that?

Finally, when Jesus tells us to be merciful, He reminds us we are living like our Heavenly Father lives — with a merciful heart. “Act like your Father,” He seems to be saying.

In a fallen world filled with pain and wrongdoing, Jesus tells us to exchange the fairness policy for the mercy policy. Such an exchange will be obedient to Jesus, will reflect our Father's nature and will greatly increase the opportunity to bring our Lord much glory.

Prayer focus

Ask God to prepare you for those “mercy opportunities” that may come your way today.

HIGH COURT JUDGE SHATTERS JUSTICE SYSTEM

Session 3

Notes:

Things to Pray For This Week:

My Next Steps:

GROUP LINKED: THE REAL ACCOUNTABILITY

“Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” James 5:16

For further study: 2 Timothy 2:24-26

This week we’ll examine a few accountability myths. We’ll learn how to confront another believer and how to respond when someone else confronts us. Sometimes our fears about accountability in small group paralyze our group at the surface level. See if any of these myths sound familiar to you:

Myth 1: If I let my small group know my weaknesses, they will reject me.

Truth: Read James 5:16.

Opening up about your struggles strengthens your small group. Odds are, if you go past the surface, your group will follow your leadership. It’s easy to have a surface-level “snacks and prayer requests” small group, but it takes strength to take your group to the next level.

Myth 2: If I confront people in my small group about their problems, it will create tension with the whole group.

Truth: Read 2 Timothy 2:24-26.

If you confront someone in the biblical way, and he or she is seeking God, it should bring healing. If the person refuses to change, they’re rejecting God’s words, not yours. On the other hand, many people confront others in a self-righteous way, which will never bring about restoration.

Myth 3: Getting real in small group means holding hands, crying and singing “Michael, Row Your Boat Ashore.” No thanks!

Truth: Read Acts 2:42-47.

Accountability doesn’t mean having a cry session every Sunday night. It’s about getting past the surface and getting honest with each other.

Prayer focus

Ask God to help you confront any of these myths that are holding back your small group.

A SPIRITUAL PHYSICAL

“Judge not, and you will not be judged; condemn not, and you will not be condemned; forgive, and you will be forgiven.” Luke 6:37

For further study: James 5:13-20

As a former high school athlete, I'm familiar with the dreaded physical — a prerequisite for anyone wanting to play a sport. It basically assured our coaches we met the minimal physical standards to endure grueling practices and compete in games. Fail the physical, get cut from the team.

In Luke Jesus advises us to give ourselves a spiritual physical before we confront another believer. We're cautioned to get ourselves right before confronting a brother with his sin. Here are three areas to examine before confronting a friend.

1. Your Attitude: Are you eager to point your finger, to condemn or judge your brother's struggle? Read Luke 6:37-38. Remember what you look like at the foot of the cross so you will approach your brother in love and humility.

2. Your Purpose: You will never change your brother or rescue him from sin. Only God has that power. You can't even bring conviction — the Holy Spirit does that. Remember, your job is to biblically confront your friend. Leave the rest to God.

3. Your Place: In our student ministry we have a small group system where a leader sticks with a group for several years. It takes time for a small group leader to earn the right to influence his or her kids. The leader builds a relationship that can bear the weight of truth. At some point the leader has the right and responsibility to confront a student's sin. Are you involved in your friend's life so that he knows you love him? Have you earned the right to speak truth into his life? That's the whole purpose of small group.

Prayer focus

If you have a friend you need to confront, ask God to show you how to do that in love and humility without weakening the message of truth.

SPECK CHECK: HOW TO CONFRONT A BELIEVER

“How can you say to your brother, ‘Brother, let me take out the speck that is in your eye,’ when you yourself do not see the log that is in your own eye?” Luke 6:42a

For further study: Matthew 18:15-17

The Bible has a great system for holding other believers accountable.

Step 1: Go to the person privately (Matthew 18:15). That doesn’t mean you call your whole small group “to pray about the issue.” It doesn’t mean you send an e-mail and blind copy your entire address book. Scripture is clear that you go to the person one-on-one. Usually a simple conversation can clear things up and restore small issues before they turn into big ones.

Step 2: Take two other believers with you (Matthew 18:16). If your friend doesn’t listen to you alone, take other trusted believers with you. (Remember, if you haven’t confronted the person alone first, don’t take friends with you.)

Step 3: Tell it to the church (Matthew 18:17). The next step is to bring the matter to your church leaders. They can offer guidance and help you communicate with your friend. The ultimate goal is that the person would come back to God.

Step 4: Treat them like a pagan (Matthew 18:17). If your friend refuses to acknowledge his sin, scripture is clear that you must treat him like a lost person. In other words you treat him as you would treat someone who does not have a relationship with God.

Prayer focus

Ask God to search your heart and show you any problems you need to confront in your own life. Think about how you can develop the habit of searching your heart daily.

WALK THE PLANK: “FIRST TAKE THE PLANK OUT OF YOUR EYE...”

“You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take out the speck that is in your brother’s eye.” Luke 6:42b

For further study: Hebrews 4:12-13

You have probably heard the flight attendant’s command: “Secure your own mask before helping your children with theirs.” There’s good reason for this clichéd instruction. You can’t really help someone else breathe if you’re gasping for breath yourself. That’s exactly what Jesus is saying when He says, “First take the log out of your own eye.” Why is it so easy to recognize other people’s bad habits, but so hard to recognize our own? In order to hold someone else accountable, you have to be willing to examine your own life in comparison to Christ and His Word. You have to look in the mirror before you put your brother under the microscope.

Here are two ways to remove logs:

- 1. Be accountable to God:** If you have a daily appointment with God, you can’t go very long until He reveals something in your life that needs to change. It’s how He makes us holy.
- 2. Let others confront you.** When a friend confronts you about something, it’s tempting to react two ways: a) Get angry and defensive; b) Point out all their flaws. Neither of these actually makes you more like Christ. Instead when someone confronts you, take it to God. See if there is truth in what your friend says. Is it backed with scripture? Does your friend genuinely want you to be close to God? Anyone can surround himself with “yes” men, but only a true friend cares enough to tell you when you’re not honoring God. If you’re serious about wanting to hold others accountable, you have to be willing to let them hold you accountable also.

Prayer focus

What is one way you can improve your accountability with God? (Choose below.)

1. Start having a daily time of prayer and Bible study.
2. Get honest with God about struggles in your life.
3. Other _____

Ask God to teach you to let others hold you accountable.

...AND ACTION!

“Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another.” Proverbs 27:17

For further study: Reread Luke 6:37-42.

When you have a small group that holds each other accountable, your group will only get stronger and be able to do great things for Christ. The enemy hates it when believers go past surface relationships with each other.

When we live our lives in seclusion, going to church but never experiencing community, we rarely change. On the other hand when we live our lives in close community, biblically holding each other accountable, the church grows stronger as we look more and more like Christ.

The following statements will help you develop an Accountability Action Plan:

One goal I have for my small group this year is ...

One way my small group can better hold each other accountable is ...

The people who most hold me accountable are ...

The person I need to confront is ...

One verse I will remember from this passage is ...

Prayer focus

Pray for your small group today. Ask God to help you build relationships with others in your group that will withstand biblical confrontation and encourage accountability.

COULD CROPS REVEAL FUTURE?

Session 4

Notes:

Things to Pray For This Week:

My Next Steps:

FRUITOLOGY

“No good tree bears bad fruit, nor again does a bad tree bear good fruit.” Luke 6:43

For further study: Galatians 5:19-23

Dendrology is the study of trees — which really only matters if you are a dendrologist or if you need to find someone who can tell you if the hedge in your backyard is a harmless holly or a rare South African man-eating bush. Most of us base our knowledge of trees on what they produce: if it's covered in cherries, it's probably not a pear tree.

There are similar ways to spot a Christ follower. Galatians 5 gives a list of fruit to look for: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. A tree doesn't produce all of its harvest at once, and some kinds of fruit take longer to ripen than others, but a good tree will have some sign of the good fruit that is to come. As Jesus teaches in Luke 6:43, you just aren't going to find good fruit on a bad tree.

So, then, can't non-Christ followers do good things? Of course they can. But no sinful human can maintain the character of Christ unless he is led by His Spirit. You can duct tape an apple to a thorn bush, but that doesn't make the thorn bush an apple tree.

Fruit is naturally produced by a well-rooted tree raised under proper conditions. A Christ follower sinks his roots into the Word of God, maintaining an environment of fellowship, ministry, worship and Bible study. Deep roots hold a Christ follower steady when a storm blows through.

Because if a tree falls in the forest and there's no dendrologist around, it doesn't really matter what kind of tree it was, does it?

Prayer focus

What kind of fruit is growing on your branches? Can people tell by watching if your tree is good or bad? Choose one of the nine types of fruit from Galatians 5:22 and ask God to show you ways to grow in that area this week.

MY LOVE IS LIKE A FRUIT SALAD

“For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks.” Luke 6:45b

For further study: 1 Corinthians 13

“Love is patient and kind;
love does not envy or boast;
it is not arrogant or rude.
It does not insist on its own way;
it is not irritable or resentful;
it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth.
Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.
Love never ends” (1 Corinthians 13:4-8).

Love is more than just a fruit: love is a fruit salad. It’s everything — every spiritual fruit, all mixed up until the flavors permanently infuse one another. Take a bite of a mandarin and you taste watermelon. Pick out a melon ball and with it comes the tang of grapefruit and the sweetness of strawberry.

The fruit of God’s Spirit is the same way. His love permeates every corner of your being until, as Luke 6:45 says, what is in your own heart overflows into words of peace, of joy, of gentleness, of faith. Only His love creates goodness, gentleness, kindness and even self-control. Maybe that’s why the word “fruit” in the verse is written as a collective noun: you can’t just pick out the pieces you like best.

In other words, even if you leave the maraschino cherries in the bowl, you’re still stuck with the juice.

Prayer focus

How’s that fruit salad coming? Remind yourself of the specific fruit that you chose after yesterday’s lesson. What other fruit of the Spirit do you think relates most closely? Where can you put that fruit into practical use today?

IT AIN'T IN THE DICTIONARY

“The good person out of the good treasure of his heart produces good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure produces evil.” Luke 6:45a

For further study: James 1:2-18

One dictionary defines joy as “the emotion evoked by well-being, success, or good fortune.” Another calls it “intense and especially ecstatic or exultant happiness.” Yet a third describes joy as “an outward show of pleasure or delight.”

True joy, the kind that only comes from knowing Christ, has nothing to do with circumstance, with happiness or with the outward show.

Joy enabled a lonely, broken man to stand on the deck of a ship in the very spot that his wife and children had disappeared beneath the waves and pen the words to a hymn of everlasting peace and faith:

“When peace, like a river, attendeth my way
When sorrows like sea billows roll;
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say,
It is well, it is well with my soul.”

Horatio Spafford brought the goodness of God “out of the good stored up in his heart” (Luke 6:45, NIV) and found the strength to choose joy when faced with the tragic loss of his family. He didn’t *feel* joyful. He *chose* to be joyful. Only when you face hardship with a heart full of God’s goodness can you truly say: “It is well with my soul.”

Prayer focus

If life is easy and your path seems bright, store up some of God’s goodness for the next time things aren’t so simple. If life is heavy and your path hard, remember a past time when the goodness of God was evident. Either way, write how God is good on a piece of paper and store it in your Bible to remind yourself that God truly is a good God.

HEY! WATCH THE THORNS!

“Each tree is known by its own fruit. For figs are not gathered from thornbushes, nor are grapes picked from a bramble bush.” Luke 6:44

For further study: Galatians 5:16-24

Stumbling into a briar patch is a nasty business — a twisted, tangled mess of whip-thin branches covered in jagged barbs. Some thorns have small hooks that embed in the skin. Some have poisoned tips that sting for hours. Some even grow sticky vines that seem to wrap themselves around legs and arms. You’ll not soon forget the experience of removing hundreds of Velcro-covered balls that have become one with your legs.

Then there are the thorn bushes that mimic friendlier flora, two of which are used by Jesus as examples in Luke 6:44. A Buckthorn plant grows inedible berries that resemble grapes. One type of thistle common to the Mediterranean area generates flowers that look like figs. Neither fruit is meant for human consumption, which could be why God covered their branches with thick, painful spikes. Thorns are nature’s way of saying, “Back off!”

Fruit produced in the life of a Christ follower is meant to glorify God, but it also attracts the seeker. The Holy Spirit removes the thorns of the natural man and replaces them with kindness, gentleness, goodness, peace and patience. If a Christ follower continued to produce spiky, pre-Christ twigs of discord, jealousy, selfish ambition and fits of rage (Galatians 5:19-21, NIV), those who are searching for Christ would be scared to approach.

The Spirit of God works within the Christ follower daily — clipping, pruning, trimming and tying back old growth to make room for the new. Sometimes pruning hurts. Sometimes it seems to damage a plant far beyond what it can take. When that seems the case, remember who is caring for you. The Master Gardener can be trusted to remove only the bad branches, leaving the good to flourish and bear better, eternal fruit.

Prayer focus

Is God doing the pruning in your life? Can you see the change in yourself from last month? From last year? From before you became a Christ follower? Look back at the fruit you chose on Day One. Write a few lines explaining how things are different in that area now.

AN APPLE A DAY

“When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples.” John 15:8, NLT

For further study: John 15:1-8

According to many an elementary school teacher, a young man named Johnny Appleseed once trotted merrily about the American countryside, scattering apples hither and yon while wearing a cooking pot on his head. Kind of creepy if you think about it, not to mention a waste of good apples.

Fruit trees don't grow by accident. To grow a tree that produces grocery store quality fruit, you begin with rootstock, a carefully tended, indoor-developed baby tree. Then you need a perfect microclimate, natural cultivars, pollinators and excellent drainage. You will also be required to fertilize, spray, prune, trim, thin and graft. If you work hard and are very fortunate, in four years you might produce enough fruit to make a decent pie.

Christ followers don't grow by accident either. On the day you acknowledged Him as King of your life, God placed within you the rootstock of a disciple. He didn't just plant the seed and leave you to wither or grow. He gave you all the tools and even stands waiting to show you how to use them.

It comes down to this: are you a disciple or not? Disciples learn. Trees grow. Disciples take on the traits of Jesus Christ. Trees generate the fruit they were intended to produce.

You already have everything you need to produce the best fruit, but it's up to you to tend the tree.

Prayer focus

Are you a student of Christ? Have you asked Him to root Himself with you? If not, spend some time considering whether you may be ready to take that step. Then ask your small group leader or a trusted Christ follower to help you. If you already are a disciple of Christ, consider what you can do to tend your tree. Is it time to prune back a habit? Is it time to fertilize with regular study or Christian fellowship or to graft a new discipline? What can you do to expand your harvest?

STORMS EXPOSE FAULTY FOUNDATIONS

Session 5

Notes:

Things to Pray For This Week:

My Next Steps:

A HOUSE ON THE ROCK

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you?” Luke 6:46

For further study: Matthew 7:21-29

Anyone who has been a parent for very long understands the feeling — that moment when you gaze on a belligerent miniature person who expects you to fetch and carry, feed and dress him and leap willingly through any hoop he sets before you. There you sit, surrounded by the mess he made, the dirty clothes you need to wash and dry by morning, the school project that requires you to coat an uncooperative balloon in newspaper and goop, and the ingredients for the cupcakes for his class party. And in the midst of all this chaos, his little arms are crossed; the lower lip is thrust out. Maybe a small foot is stamped. And you find yourself asking, “Why can’t you just obey?”

Many who claim to be “Christian” have made professions of faith. Some have even been baptized. They file into their seats, sing loudly, drop a tip in the offering basket and nod along to the sermon. They pray before meals, never skip church and argue passionately at business meetings. They may sing in a choir, teach a Bible study class or lead a small group. It’s not hard to convince people of your dedication to the cause of Christ. Too bad it’s not people you have to convince.

You can be a student of scripture and not be a Christ follower. You can respect all that Jesus stood for and not be His disciple. You can even believe that Jesus is everything that He said He was and yet not make Him your Lord. And, as Jesus says in Luke 6:46, you can profess to be a child of God without being willing to follow His directions.

Parents don’t easily tolerate disobedient children. How much more painful it must be for our Father to hear us — His children — call Him Lord and then refuse to obey.

Prayer focus

Are you willing to follow God’s directions? Is there something He has been telling you to do? Have you been stalling, looking for a way out or just plain refusing? Make today the day that you determine to obey. Write down the direction you feel God is giving you; then list the first three steps you need to take in order to be obedient. Ask for His strength and take that first step today.

DISASTER ON THE PLAINS

“Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock.” Luke 6:47-48

For further study: Joshua 24:14-15; Deuteronomy 6:1-9

I was born on the plains of the deep south. It’s a downright paradise for one looking for a simple, rural and slow lifestyle. When building a house there, it was very important to pay close attention to the type of foundation a home was placed on. Much of the southern plains consists of a sticky, highly elastic soil known as prairie soil. Prairie soil holds moisture, expands and contracts much more significantly than does normal soil. Much to the chagrin of home builders, during the rainy season settling prairie soil can wreak havoc on a foundation, causing walls to crack and weakening the entire structure.

If a man wants to build a house that can stand through the rainy season, he’s got to start with the foundation. If he wants to build a family that doesn’t fall to pieces, he must do the same.

First Timothy 5:8 tells us that God holds the father accountable for the physical provision and well-being of his family. God also holds the father accountable for the spiritual training of his family (Ephesians 6:4; Deuteronomy 6:7). A wise father digs deep and lays his foundation on the rock (Luke 6:48). He doesn’t just supply his children with information about a Spirit-filled life; he lives one. He models a life of obedience, a life voluntarily brought under control. He builds his house on those foundations, adding the decorative bits — the parts other people see — after the structure is sound.

Prayer focus

A Christ-centered life is marked by these five characteristics: worship, biblical community, service, influence and generosity. Are you modeling these characteristics for your family? Ask God to show you any areas where your spiritual foundation is weak, and identify steps you need to take to strengthen it.

ROCK THE CRADLE, RULE THE WORLD

And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.” Luke 6:48

For further study: Proverbs 31:10-31

You can depend on certain elements in a really great Western movie. The rancher's daughter will fall in love with the penniless cowboy. There will be at least one shoot 'em up in a dusty, empty street. And there's gonna be a barn raisin' — or a house, or a school, or a church, depending on the plot. The ladies all bring hampers full of goodies, and the men gather at the foundation of the building, which has already been laid. After the obligatory dance number the men split into four teams and create some cinema magic: the walls and roof are up in time to eat their stew while it's still steaming.

Second Timothy 1:5 tells of two women, Eunice and Lois, whose faith was so evident that they raised a boy who, as a teenager, became an evangelist and a partner with the Apostle Paul. Some of the great men in the Bible had mothers who were devoted to God: Samuel, who was the first prophet; Isaac, from whom the Jewish race would stem; and John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the coming of Jesus.

Dad may have foundation duty, but a house needs walls. That's where Mom comes in.

Her daughters learn to be women by her example. Her sons will one day choose a wife based largely on what they've seen at home. Strong walls don't spring up overnight; it takes years of dedication to build a family that can withstand all that life holds. When a mother builds walls according to God's directions, no flood can shake them.

Prayer focus

What kind of mother are you? Men, are you providing your wife with the foundation she needs to build strong walls? If you're unmarried, do you know what kind of parent you want your future spouse to be? Choose something from Proverbs 31 that is missing from the "walls" of your home. Ask God to show you a way to change, or how you can support the mother in your home as she strives to flood-proof your home.

THE HOUSE THAT ROCKS TOGETHER ...

“But the one who hears and does not do (what I say) is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation.” Luke 6:49

For further study: Genesis 35:1-15

Genesis 35 begins with Jacob, a father and grandfather many times over, receiving a direction from God. He was to pack up and move, following a lengthy and perilous route, which he apparently did without question. Once he reached his destination, his only goal was to build an altar. That’s a heavy conversation to have with your wife: “Hi, honey. How was your day? Me? Oh, not too much. Bought a new camel, judged a goat-tying competition. The usual. By the way, I need you to pack up the clay pots again. We’re moving across the country so I can build a pile of rocks.”

Not only did Jacob have to move, he had to remove all foreign idols from his home and clean up his family. Imagine telling a hormonal teenager to forfeit his iPod, Xbox, cell phone and PC, then go take a shower and put on some “normal” clothes because God said so.

Hear that? Dozens of parents just hit the floor. But what if God told you to do just that? Could you obey? Would you obey? Or would you continue to build your “house on the ground without a foundation?” (Luke 6:49).

Jacob brought himself into line with God, and his children followed. And, as always, God blessed and protected a family founded on obedience.

God may not be telling you to move across the country, and you probably don’t have a shrine to Ashtoreth in your living room. He doesn’t despise technology or search for ways to suppress creativity. He does, however, desire for you to live as a light among men (Matthew 5:16), which may require some changes in yourself and your household.

Are you ready to live a life of obedience for the sake of your family?

Prayer focus

What example are you setting for the children in your life? Do they see you show respect for authority? Are they watching you as you study, pray and tithe? Have they learned about God’s great love for all people when they see you serve others? What part of your life do you need to bring into obedience for the sake of your children?

IF YOUR HOUSE DOESN'T ROCK, IT'S GOING TO ROLL

"... and the ruin of that house was great." Luke 6:49

For further study: 1 Samuel 3:10-14

Eli was a priest of Israel. His father had been a priest. His grandfather had been a priest. He could trace his lineage back to the priests who served with Aaron in the Tabernacle. It was a genetic heritage, the truest calling of God. Eli was a dedicated, righteous man. And his sons were worthless.

Priests by blood and by appointment, spiritual leaders of a nation, and yet, "The sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the Lord" (1 Samuel 2:12). They were also adults, which would, in our society, make them accountable for their own actions. God saw the situation differently. He judged Eli responsible for allowing his boys to become what they were. God, speaking to a servant boy named Samuel, said of Eli: "I am about to punish his house forever, for the iniquity that he knew, because ... he did not restrain them" (1 Samuel 3:13). Does that seem unfair to you? It probably would be, except for this statement about Eli and his boys: "They would not listen to the voice of their father" (1 Samuel 2:25).

Eli's boys didn't become evil overnight. They knew better. Yet they had such little respect for good old dad that they blew him off when he begged them to change. Somewhere along the way Eli had lost the right to speak into his children's lives, both as their father and as their pastor.

Prayer focus

Are you willing to let your house crumble because obedience is difficult? Can your children look to you for guidance because of your example thus far? What changes do you need to make so that the children in your life will know they can listen to you? If it's too late to raise your children, how can you commit to live so that your grandchildren have a place to turn for advice?