

Life of Christ



The Bible Way Online

THE GOAL OF THIS STUDY

Our goal is to come to know Jesus Christ in a deeper, more personal way. We want to read and study His life, learn more facts about what He did, places he walked and words that He said. Our aim, though, is not just to know the facts about His life. Sadly, many people know a lot about Jesus but don't know Him personally. These people do not have eternal life. This truth is important for all of us because Jesus himself said, "This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent." (John 17:3). The purpose of this booklet is to help us come to know Jesus personally in a way that brings us to experience and participate in this "eternal life".

Pray to God right now, asking what the apostle Paul expressed in Philippians 3:10: "that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death". To really know Christ means to have a life experience and not to just memorize some historical facts.

To really know Christ means to become like Him. Our goal, then, is to "... come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;" (Ephesians 4:13). To know Christ is to become like Him.

To know Jesus demands that we obey Him. The demons knew his identity. They shouted to the multitudes that He was the Son of God, but they didn't really know Him because they refused to obey Him. "He who says, 'I know Him,' and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him." (1 John 2:4). The goal of this study is to know Jesus personally, obeying His commandments and becoming like Him in everything.

MATTHEW 5:1-12

3 Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

4 Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.

5 Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth.

6 Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.

7 Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy.

8 Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God.

9 Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God.

10 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

11 Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake.

12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

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January 2010

WHAT IS THE LIFE OF CHRIST?

"The life was manifested, and we [the apostles of Jesus] have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us". (1 John 1:2.)

"In Him was life, and the life was the light of men." (John 1:4).

It is a historical fact that a man, Jesus of Nazareth, lived about 2,000 years ago. We know where He was born, the names of some in his family, how He died and, yes, that in him was life and that He himself was LIFE. His coming was a demonstration of life and this life is eternal. With Christ, "LIFE" stopped being just an abstract theory of philosophy. LIFE manifested itself as a carpenter's son, who walked, talked, ate, slept, cried and loved and whose resurrection from the dead proved Him to be who He claimed to be. He said of Himself: "I am the way, the truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me."

Christ is life and life is Christ. If you have eternal life it is because you have Christ. If you don't have Christ, you don't have life. Real life, eternal life, which is the life of Christ, is much more than mere existence. Many exist who have never found "life". In the following lessons let's examine the quality of the life of Christ, taking note of His virtues, attributes and the kind of person He is. In view of this is presented the plan of this study:

THE STUDY PLAN

In Matthew 5:3-12, we read the "beatitudes" of Jesus. Actually, we find here a beautiful portrait of how a Christian ought to be. Each "beatitude" shows an attribute and in each one we know that the very best example is Jesus Himself. If we want to be like Jesus we ought to imitate this example in our lives. This study, then, will be organized around the qualities that we see in the "beatitudes" of Matthew 5: humility, compassion, gentleness, righteousness, mercy, purity, peace making and faithfulness. We want to learn what each quality means, how it is seen in the person of Jesus and, finally, give a practical application and exhortation for us to participate in and possess this same quality.

Unless otherwise stated, Quotations are from the New King James Bible

JESUS: THE HUMBLE (Matthew 5:3)

CHAPTER 1

HUMILITY: WHAT IS IT?

An outstanding quality of the life of Christ is his amazing humility. Why would anyone come from so high to descend so low just to rescue us from our certain destruction? Why would the Holy One stoop to wash the feet of the betrayer, the denier, and the coward?

The opposite of humility is self-centeredness, or pride. This is the basic characteristic of a mindset influenced and controlled by Satan. What is often taught as a virtue in our American culture is presented as a sin in the Bible. We read in Proverbs 6:16, 17 that "a proud look is an abomination to the LORD." God promises to "destroy the house of the proud," (Proverbs 15:25). "A haughty look, a proud heart ... are sin." (Proverbs 21:4). "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble." (James 4:6). To be proud means, "to consider yourself to be superior to others". It is a wrong way of looking at yourself with respect to others. To really appreciate humility, we can contrast it with its opposite quality, which is pride:

- Pride says: "Don't tell me anything. I already know it all." Humility says: "Thanks for your advice and help."
- Pride says: "I need, I want, I deserve." Humility says: "He needs, they want, you deserve."
- Pride says: "God, I am so much better than my fellow man." Humility says: "Lord have mercy on me, a sinner."
- Pride criticizes others to tear them down. Humility praises others in order to build them up.
- Pride exalts himself but God resists him. Humility humbles himself before God and God lifts him up.
- Pride says: "I can do all things." Humility says: "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me."

- Pride says: "I want to be served." Humility said: "I did not come to be served but to serve and to give my life as a ransom for many."
- Pride says: "Look what I did." Humility says: "See what God has done in me!"
- Pride stood in the streets and shouted: "Crucify him! He became more popular than we are". Humility, hanging on the cross, looked upward and prayed: "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."
- Pride seeks the glory but does not find it. Humility receives glory and honor from others without seeking it.

The difference between pride and humility is the difference between light and darkness. When "The Light" came into the world, the perfect example of humility was revealed to us.

JESUS IS OUR EXAMPLE OF HUMILITY

In the life of Jesus Christ, we can see a living demonstration of what it means to be humble. In his relationship with God and also with people, he always proved himself to be an humble servant, without pretension, without pride, unselfish and unprejudiced.

In Jesus we see a man who gave himself to the downtrodden of his age. He associated with workers and fishermen. He drank from the same cup of the mixed race woman who was so despised and rejected by religious people. Jesus showed his spirit of humility when, entering in each city, he touched the unclean bodies of the lepers and the tongues of the deaf mutes. He cared for the demon possessed ones to whom others were so afraid to get near. He accepted the invitations to eat in the houses of sinners and publicans as well as Pharisees and hypocrites.

Jesus did not avoid any class of person. Women of ill repute came to him knowing they would find understanding, forgiveness and also a command to go and sin no more. Jesus was at ease in the presence of the rich and powerful as well as beggars and blind men who lived along the dusty roads to any city. Jesus took time from his busy agenda to speak to others, answer questions, extend mercy and show the better way to live. He visited houses of the people and services of other religious leaders, attended weddings, went fishing with friends and blessed little children. He never failed to stop and answer a call for help. Even though he had all the rights to be exalted and to glorify himself (after all, he knew that he was the only begotten Son of God) Jesus always insisted that it was his Father who did everything. In Jesus we can see all the attitudes associated with a person poor in spirit: humility, submission, service, faith and love.

Consider four areas in which Jesus' humility stands out:

1. HIS BIRTH - Read Philippians 2:5ff and Luke 2. It was not by chance that Jesus was born in a stable and laid in a manger. "Though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor, that you through His poverty might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9). He was not born in a sanitized hospital and laid on silk sheets in a crib of ivory. Actually, though, even that would have been a huge step-down from the glory, honor and power he emptied himself of in order to come into the world. Have you ever heard of the owner and CEO of a large multinational company who left all his wealth, comfort and honor just to live among society's rejects because he had compassion for them and wanted to help them? If you can imagine that, then multiply it by 1000 and you will just barely begin to understand Jesus' love and humility.

2. HIS TOTAL DEPENDENCE ON HIS HEAVENLY FATHER We all seem to strive to be independent, to be on our own. We may say, "I can take care of myself" or "I am a self made man" with a good dose of pride. But we are seeing how humility is allowing God to be everything, surrendering ourselves to Him and to His will. In Jesus we see this perfect, voluntary, dependence. Listen to his words in John's gospel:

5:19 - "The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He sees the Father do"

5:30 - "I can of Myself do nothing."

6:38 - "For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.

7:16, 17 - "My doctrine is not Mine, but His who sent Me."

8:28 - "I do nothing of Myself; but as My Father taught Me, I speak these things."

8:50 - "I do not seek My own glory; there is One who seeks and judges."

14: 10 - "The words that I speak to you I do not speak on My own authority; but the Father who dwells in Me does the works."

14:24 - "The word which you hear is not Mine but the Father's who sent Me."

... And many more

Jesus gave the Father all the credit. He became as nothing so God could be everything. He totally submitted himself to the Father's words, works and will. That is how God was able to gain, in the life of Jesus, the redemption of the human race.

The life of Christ is a life of self-denial and complete dependence on God. In all his humility, though, He lost nothing, because the Father has "highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father" (Philippians 2:11).

May this be our life also.

3. HIS SERVICE TO OTHERS – See Luke 22:27 and John 13:5. One who humbles himself before God is able to humble himself before men. He was a servant to all. Can you picture the Lord of all, taking a towel and water basin, kneeling before unworthy men to wash their dirty feet, including the friend who would soon betray him and the disciple who would insist three times that very night that he did not know him? He washed the feet of brothers who had just been fussing about which of them would be the greatest in the kingdom. What a fantastic example he gave us! If we ever think that we are too high and mighty to kneel down before the filthy of this world to help remove their stench, then we are not yet like the Son of God!

4. HIS LIFESTYLE – Jesus led a simple life. He didn't reside in palaces. He even discouraged a would-be follower saying, "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head" (Matthew 8:20). His simplicity and humility become even more impressive when we remember that He is the one who created the universe. By all rights, everything belonged to him, but when Jesus entered into Jerusalem to be crowned as king of the Jews and Messiah who could save all the people, he chose to come riding on a donkey!

Read Matthew 21:1-5. What a difference between the values of Jesus and the other "great men of history"! They say that Alexander the Great entered India in a grand procession of 200 painted elephants, 200 soldiers on black horses and 200 lions surrounding him as he sat on a golden throne atop an ivory chariot proclaiming "I am the Lord of the universe. I conquered the world. Now I will conquer the stars". Alexander died at 33 and today owns nothing. But the humble king Jesus is still the King of kings and Lord of lords. The humble road of this unpretentious servant carried him to eternal glory.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

The proof of our humility before God is how we live among people. It is easy to say that we love God whom we do not see but true love is seen in our love for our neighbor and in our humility. How do you know that Christ lives in you? Can it be that you participate in his character? To know if you are humble or not, it is necessary to examine your daily life.

- Do you live giving preference to others? (Romans 12:16)
- Are you wise in your own eyes? Romans 12:16)
- Do you really love without getting puffed up and without serving your own interests? (1 Corinthians 13:4, 5)

- Do you serve others in love? (Galatians 5:13)
- Do you put up with others in love and longsuffering? (Ephesians 5:21)
- Do you consider others superior to yourself? (Philippians 2:3)
- Do you forgive others like Jesus forgave you? (Colossians 3:13)

What is it like to be humble? The answer is in the way you treat people. Only when we consider ourselves as nothing in relation to God will we be able to consider as superior those who have less knowledge, talent, wisdom and holiness. Adopt Christ's spirit that did not seek his own glory. If this is not your spirit, then do the following exercises to grow in humility.

EXERCISES TO GROW IN HUMILITY

1. Think about the example of Jesus more and the beauty of His humility and His way of treating others.
2. Think about how dependent you are on God. On your own you can't even breathe. He gives us everything to sustain us and care for us.
3. Think about your own sins. How often have you done wrong? How far do you fall short of God's glory? How many times have you had the opportunity to do good and haven't.
4. Think about the cross on Calvary - the price Jesus paid for your sins.
5. Put Jesus on the throne of your heart, making the decision to submit your will, actions and life to him.
6. Pray for God to help you grow in humility.
7. Begin to practice the things that an humble person would do. If you can't control your feelings, at least you can control your actions, trusting God to give you the correct feelings. So submit yourself to God and to other persons, seeking their interests instead of your own.

SELF-EXAMINATION:

Answer these questions in order to measure your own level of humility:

1. Do you consider yourself superior to others?
2. Do you think you still need to read and study the Bible in order to understand better the will of God for your life?
3. Do you ask God daily to help you face the trials of life?
4. Do you feel put out when someone orders you to do something?
5. Are you really conscious of the fact that all you have belongs to God?
6. Did you yield this week to the will, opinion or preference of someone else?
7. Do you feel good when you help someone poorer, less educated, or in a lower social class than yourself?
8. When you have a misunderstanding with another person, do you find it difficult to ask forgiveness or apologize?
9. Did you hurt someone with your words this week?
10. Do you feel bad when you do a good deed but nobody sees or nobody recognizes you for doing it?

JESUS: THE COMPASSIONATE (Matthew 5:4)

CHAPTER 2

COMPASSION: WHAT IS IT?

Some people say that Jesus was a revolutionary. They say he was radical. They are right! It is true that he didn't try to overthrow the government of any country. He did not get involved in politics; he didn't encourage workers to go on strike; he never took up arms to fight against the authorities. To the contrary, Jesus always taught his followers to submit to the "powers that be". However, what he did teach and the movement he began was so different from what already existed that the society of his day rejected him and crucified him.

When Jesus preached his "sermon on the mount", the predominate religion was Judaism and the military-political power was in the hands of the Roman Empire. See how Jesus' words conflicted with the ideas of the leaders of these two groups:

The religious leaders of the Jews were mostly Pharisees, a group known for their pride and self-righteousness. Do you remember the prayer of the Pharisee in the temple? "Lord, I thank you that I am not like this publican sinner here beside me." The Roman soldiers prided themselves for having conquered the world by force. So here comes a carpenter's son saying, "Blessed are the humble ones." That is quite radical, isn't it?

The Pharisees were the "sanctified ones." They considered themselves so superior to others that they would not even touch a "sinner". Jesus, though, "the friend of sinners" came telling: "Blessed are those who weep"; that is, those filled with compassion, a sensitive heart, the contrite, those whose hearts are touched with the sorrows of others.

The Roman Empire lived by the rule of "might makes right" and the voice that spoke the loudest was the sword. Our Jesus taught: "Blessed are the meek."

The Pharisees robbed widows' houses and for pretense prayed long prayers but Jesus said: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness."

The Pharisees announced with trumpets that they were about to give a beggar a coin. They prayed in the public town squares and streets so they would be seen by men. But Jesus arrived on the scene saying, "Blessed are the pure of heart, the sincere ones."

The Roman Empire lived for battles, conquest and destruction. Jesus taught, "Blessed are the peacemakers."

Can you imagine the reaction of the people who heard Jesus teach? It would be like the man who commented about the Jesus' instruction to "turn the other cheek": This man said, "That won't work anymore. If you do that you'll lose out every time." Some think Jesus' words are beautiful but impractical. Remember, though, that Jesus did not only teach, but he lived what he taught. The Pharisees and the Roman Empire have disappeared from the world but Jesus still lives. He doesn't just live in his teachings and in his followers but he rose from the dead and the kingdom he came to establish was indeed established and millions have entered into it and are still entering.

In Matthew 5:4 Jesus said that those who weep are blessed because they will be comforted. This idea is contrary to the modern mindset that teaches us that real men don't cry. We hear our society telling the youth: "Don't look back, enjoy life, have fun, you only go around one time, do whatever you feel like doing, to be sad or feel remorse is stupid." But Jesus still proclaimed that those who weep are blessed.

There is, in itself, no virtue in weeping. Jesus is not promoting pessimism, self-pity, wounded pride, frustrated ambition, pain or suffering. Jesus is not saying, "Blessed is the spoiled child who cries when he doesn't get what he wants." He isn't saying: Blessed is the criminal who laments going to jail." That's not it at all. The compassionate person, contrite and sensitive, is the one with a heart that is touched by the sufferings of others or by his own sins. This person will be blessed because God will comfort him in his sorrows.

A rose has a sweet smell but break a rose petal and see what happens. You will discover that each petal has a storehouse of perfume that was destined to die in the flower. That is the way it is with a human heart closed, insensitive, never broken, only living for self. It will never find the treasure hidden within. That treasure is only set free when the heart is broken, sensitive, contrite, and compassionate. It is true: blessed are they who weep.

JESUS IS OUR EXAMPLE OF COMPASSION:

When you read the Gospels, you'll be impressed with the compassion of Jesus. He was always touched by the desperate situation of the sorrowful. A leper came to him crying, "If you will, you can purify me". (Mark 1:40). Now lepers were not very pleasing in appearance. They were banned from community living. But there was something about Jesus that made them know they could approach him. Jesus drew them to himself so it wasn't out of character that, when he heard the leper's plea, he was "deeply moved", he extended his hand, touched

him and said: 'Be clean!' And he never failed to reach out and touch them, leaving them perfectly clean. That's just the way Jesus was.

In the city of Nain, he saw a widow at the burial of her only son. Seeing her grief, he had compassion on her and said, "Do not weep." He then proceeded to bring her son back to life (Luke 7:13).

Leaving Jericho, some time later, Jesus saw two blind men, "touched their eyes and they immediately they received their sight" (Matthew 20:34).

The Bible doesn't say that Jesus wept when he heard that his friend, Lazarus, had died. But when he arrived at the tomb, seeing Mary and others weeping, "He groaned in the spirit and was troubled" and wept. (John 11:33, 35). The sorrow of others touched his sensitive heart. Whether it was the grieving, the blind, the lame, the lepers, the prostitutes, or just plain sinners, Jesus felt their pain and did what he could to help.

The WORD who became flesh, (John 1:1), who created the universe and placed everything in order, who still holds it all together (Colossians 1:16, 17) powerful with all authority; divine but compassionate and sensitive to our pain and grief - this is our Jesus!!! See your Creator with your hearts' eyes, pained and weeping, and you will know the life of Christ a little bit more. Never again will you say, "real men don't cry".

Jesus' greatest compassion, though, is not for sick bodies but for sick souls. We read in Matthew 9:35-36 how Jesus felt compassion for the multitude who were like sheep without a shepherd, lost people, aimlessly wandering, not knowing what they were looking for, nor where they were headed. Someone could say, "That's their problem. Each one chooses their own destiny." But Jesus would not close his heart to their situation. He was touched by their spiritual condition. That's why he came.

We read in Luke 19:41-44, that Jesus, coming into his beloved city, Jerusalem, also wept. He looked into the future of that city and it was dark. The Jews rejected Jesus and refused to repent of their sins and for that would suffer a terrible punishment. Enemy armies would invade and destroy the city. All the inhabitants would be killed or sold like slaves to other countries. The glorious temple, symbol of their privilege and the presence of God among them would be torn down, leaving not one stone on top of another. All that did happen 40 years later. Jesus loved them and cried thinking about the destiny of the rebellious and disobedient.

It is significant that this scene happened a week before his own painful death. On the eve of his own cruel death, Jesus did not cry for himself but he cried over Jerusalem, knowing they had rejected their only hope for salvation when they rejected him. His tears were not for his own imminent suffering but the suffering of those he loved. Jesus had compassion for sinners. Jesus has compassion for you today, whether for your loneliness, pain, sorrow or your sinful condition. He can save you. He wants to save you. He died to save you.

"Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today and forever." (Hebrews 13:8). He does not change nor will he ever change. With the compassion he had for those people, he will today "sympathize with our weaknesses ... in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus weeps for you in your afflictions and wants you to feel for others in their sorrows also. Jesus is our perfect example of a compassionate, sensitive person.

PERSONAL APPLICATION:

Let's notice three areas in which we should be emotionally touched. First, we ought to weep with his sufferings of people. Some people cry over a broken glass and spilled milk but not when they see a broken life. That's just not right. We must recognize the infinite value of a person and our hearts should be touched by their sufferings. Let our hearts be touched by people and not things. Try to see God's hand in everything, be it the face of a little child, the beauty of a smile, pleasant words of a friend or the sacrifice of love. Jesus was that way. Like Jesus, wherever we go, seeing the human condition, hearing the cries of the grieving, be compassionate, stop to help, encourage, console. You will be like Jesus Christ and you will be blessed.

Second, we need to weep and lament because of the sins of others. It doesn't make sense to be moved to tears because of the physical suffering of others but ignore the sins that are leading them to eternal death. After all, when we appear before the Judge of all souls, what will it matter if our stomachs are full or empty? We should weep when we see a brother in Christ return to the world and decide to live in sin (see 1 Corinthians 5:1-2). We need to weep with the fact that our society walks in darkness. Evil will overcome the good if we stand idly by. We must evangelize the lost and quit doing nothing in front of prostitution, pornography, drunkenness and corruption. Every day the number of young people addicted to drugs increases. Can we say we feel compassion for them if we do nothing to help them? Christians must love what is good but also hate that which destroys lives and souls.

Third, we ought to weep because of our own sins. In this we cannot follow Jesus' example because he never sinned. He did teach us, though, that before we look at the sins of others, we must look inside our own selves. The Pharisees condemned the sins of others but ignored their own failures. We need to examine our own selves, feel remorse, let our own hearts be broken and be filled with a contrite spirit in a way that leads us to repentance. (Psalm 51:17)

"Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Lament and mourn and weep! Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will lift you up" (James 4:8-10). Be like the people on the day of Pentecost who, hearing from Peter that they had crucified the Son of God, "were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37) Be sensitive to your own spiritual condition.

SELF-EXAMINATION:

Answer these questions to measure your own level of compassion:

1. Do you think that God will be sad if you sin?
2. Have you ever implored a friend, "Please, quit doing what you are doing? It is sin!"
3. Have you ever told the gospel to someone who was not a Christian?
4. Do you think it is funny to see a drunk stagger and fall, walking down the street?
5. Do you like to listen to gossip?
6. Are you less sensitive to some things that you once found offensive?
7. Do you enjoy watching films that exalt violence, immorality and obscene language?
8. Does the sight of beggars, blind or crippled folks touch your heart?
9. Are you happy that the evil, perverse people of this world are going to receive what they deserve?
10. Do you feel remorse when you fall into temptation and sin against God?

JESUS: THE MEEK (Matthew 5:5)

CHAPTER 3

MEEKNESS: WHAT IS IT?

We often hear that the Christian ought to be different from people in the world. This is true. The difference that Christ makes in our lives should be very noticeable. But, it is not that the person who is in Christ has to walk around in a suit and tie or that the Christian woman has to only use homemade clothes or wear her hair in a certain way. These things are exterior; that is, superficial (on the surface). Jesus said that the difference between his follower and a person of the world is in his inner person, his character. What the world should see when they look at the life of a Christian is exactly the inner, spiritual expressions of humility, compassion, meekness, righteousness, mercy, purity, peace and faithfulness. When we begin to manifest these qualities, the world will clearly see, the Lord will be glorified and more people will be drawn toward the Way.

One of the least sought attributes is meekness. Someone once said, "If all God's attributes were offered at auction, the last one to be sold would be meekness." Few people understand what it is and fewer still value this quality that so characterizes the Lord Jesus.

"Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth", Jesus said in Matthew 5:5. What does it mean to be meek? According to our dictionary, to be meek means you are "showing patience and humility, gentleness ... easily imposed upon, submissive". The meek one doesn't throw fits or fly off the handle under pressure. A good synonym is "gentle". A meek person is under control.

To be meek does not mean to be weak. A horse, before it is tamed, is strong but, being wild, is useless to man. After being tamed it does not lose its strength. It just becomes tamed, controlled and useful. A good definition for meekness is "strength under control".

Rome conquered the world but the Christians conquered the Roman Empire. Nero tossed and turned in his bed in the royal palace while the Christians slept peacefully in their prison cells. They found the victory in their redemption and their courage was a result of their conviction. They gained patience in their sufferings. Those primitive Christians acquired spiritual strength, based in the truth, tempered in persecution and which reflected the image of the nature of Christ. Let's examine this attribute that is so very essential in the Christian life: meekness.

JESUS IS OUR EXAMPLE OF MEEKNESS

Perhaps the most misunderstood quality of the life of Christ is his gentleness or meekness. He wasn't weak but strong. Remember how he was arrested, beaten with rods, scourged with a whip, spit on and mocked. The multitude called for his death and he was nailed to a Roman cross. The crowd challenged him, "If you are the Son of God, come down!"

Now consider what he could have done. He could control the tempest with a word, walk on the water, feed 5,000 people with a few loaves and fishes and even raise the dead. On the cross he could have called 10,000 angels to set him free and destroy that ungrateful generation. But he didn't do it. Jesus, "committed no sin, nor was deceit found in His mouth ... when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously" (1 Peter 2:22,23). Listen to what he did say on that cross: "Father, forgive them for they do not know what they do." Now that is meekness, properly defined as strength under control, calmness in the midst of trials and tranquility of soul even in difficult circumstances.

The meekness of the Messiah was the subject of prophecy in the Old Testament. Isaiah 12:1-4 or Matthew 12:15-21 tell of the characteristics of this person of whom Jehovah said: "Behold! My Servant whom I uphold, My Elect One in whom My soul delights! He will not cry out, nor raise His voice, nor cause His voice to be heard in the street. A bruised reed He will not break and smoking flax He will not quench." Jesus did not stand in the streets, shouting, with his face red from anger, trying to convince the unbelievers of the errors of their ways. Jesus, according to this prophecy, did not destroy a broken reed or snuff out a smoldering candlewick.

Think about these two expressions: Back then, a reed or small rod was used like either a ruler or walking cane. If you broke it, it became useless. This broken reed represents a weak, fragile person. How did Jesus look at weak, frail people? He did not despise them. Jesus, among the weak, despised or outcasts, showed patience and sympathy. He identified with them, treated them with respect and lifted them to a higher plane. He didn't discard them; rather, he treated them with greater care. He was gentle.

The smoldering wick was similar to this. When a candle or oil lamp goes out, the wick begins to smolder and smoke. That could be irritating to the eyes so the easiest thing to do was to reach over and pinch the wick. It quickly goes out. That smoldering wick represents an irritating, inconvenient person. How did Jesus treat that

kind of person? He put up with them! Instead of getting rid of them, he took care of them. Jesus did not stomp on weak, obnoxious, problematic, immature people!

Jesus did not promote weakness but tolerance and so was able to help the weak become strong. He did not load them down with burdens too heavy for them to bear. He always called people to behave well and to be of good character but, at the same time, he understood and put up with the silliness and immaturities of the weak. Jesus was on the side of the weak. He never stopped being gentle.

It may seem strange to say but Jesus did not leave his meekness when he expelled the moneychangers from the temple. He was not out of control. Rather, he knew exactly what he was doing. He didn't stop being meek in Matthew 23 when he denounced the hypocrites: "Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?" Nor will he cease to be meek when, one day, he "is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ." (2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8). To be meek doesn't mean you don't fight against evil, rebuke the sinner or try to correct an injustice. Some times force must be used. We must take action, speak out, resist, but we just do it the right way, Jesus' way, the controlled way.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Meekness is in the list of attributes the Spirit produces in the life of the Christian (Galatians 5:22-3). This means that, when the Spirit of God is controlling our lives, we will not have that desire to return evil for evil toward that person that provokes us. When criticized, we will not explode in anger. When we are mistreated, we are able to forgive the one who hurt us. This is meekness.

To be meek does not mean that we give in to all evil desires or injustices of others. False doctrine has to be corrected. Sin must be rejected; Oppression and injustice must be fought, but always in a controlled manner. Our opposition to wrongdoing must be without bitterness, nastiness or disequilibrium.

We ought to treat people with respect (Titus 3:1, 2). We should correct the brethren with care and delicately. Being meek, gentle people, we can treat people like packages labeled with signs that say, "FRAGILE, HANDLE WITH CARE". Human beings are frail. Let's be careful not to hurt them with our words of resentment or with rough handling. Let's treat people with great care and tenderness, especially those who are far away from God.

The Bible speaks about gentleness especially with respect to women. Our society, with advertising, films, soap operas, books and magazines, is constantly deceiving women. They hear on every hand that, to be popular and attractive, they have to be "sexy" and sensual. They are constantly bombarded with the lie that beauty is the result of physical characteristics and that a little botox injected in the lips, a thinner nose or bigger bust makes them beautiful. That is one of Satan's lies. The Bible emphasizes that inner qualities make a woman beautiful and attractive. 1 Peter 3:3, 4 says "Do not let your adornment be merely outward; arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel; rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very precious in the sight of God."

It is not a sin to be pretty. In fact, God created the woman to be attractive and pleasing to the man. God doesn't condemn the woman who is outwardly pretty. There is no virtue in purposefully dressing shabbily. The Bible says there is something much more important and basic that attracts and impresses the man. It is purity, reverence; it is a gentle, quiet spirit that can influence the man for good. With time, the physical body loses its shape, the face gets lines and blemishes but the gentle spirit gets more beautiful every day. "Growing old gracefully" is better than growing old disgracefully.

SELF-EXAMINATION:

Answer these questions in order to measure your own level of meekness:

1. Do you holler at family or colleagues?

2. When falsely accused, do you defend yourself with excessive vehemence?
3. Do you insist in having the last word in a discussion?
4. Would your associates be astonished if you became enraged at someone?
5. Do you have the reputation as a person who remains calm in the middle of a tempest?
6. Do you try to choose words that will not hurt someone's feelings?
7. Do you try to get even with the person who hurts you?
8. Do you want to fight with the person who breaks in front of you in line?
9. When you rebuke someone, does it make you feel good to see them embarrassed or angry?
10. Are you able to remain kind, gentle and submissive when you are fighting against some injustice?

JESUS: THE RIGHTEOUS (Matthew 5:6)

CHAPTER 4

RIGHTEOUSNESS: WHAT IS IT?

"Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they shall be filled." (Matthew 5:6). The Bible truth is that man needs more than food and drink to sustain his life. He needs spiritual nutrition for his soul. That's why Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." (Matthew 4:4). He also said, "Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him" (John 6:27).

Man is not just a mere animal with physical necessities. We are the special creation of God, made in His image and likeness, equipped with spiritual, emotional and physical needs and desires. We need an intimate relationship with God our Creator and this comes through Jesus Christ.

Matthew 5:6 reminds us of the TV scenes of starving immigrants who flee some drought, civil unrest, or political upheaval with only the clothes on their back. They work or travel in oppressive heat while their little children's bones seem to protrude through their tight skin and their bellies bloat up with parasites. Most of us don't have a clue what real starvation feels like. What a joy it is for these refugees to find abundant food and water!

People are searching for something in life that satisfies their desires and needs. They are hungry and thirsty but not only for bread and water. They want things, material possessions, close relationships, meaning for life and peace. They want to be happy. There is, though, a more vital hunger that God wants us to experience and always stands ready to satisfy. It is hunger and thirst for righteousness. Remembering that "blessed" is sometimes translated "happy", notice what Jesus did not say. He didn't say that those who seek happiness will be happy. Instead, he said that those who seek righteousness will be happy. Those who seek God and His will, those who want to think and act rightly, will find happiness.

Often, the folks who are hungry and thirsty try to satisfy their desires in the wrong way. A child arrives at school hungry and fills up on candy, but when lunchtime comes around he doesn't want to eat anymore. So it is that many who try to satisfy their desires with material things, like alcohol, drugs, sex, various amusements and unspiritual pleasures, discover that they don't find lasting joy. Jesus showed us the path to true satisfaction, contentment and fulfillment in life. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness.

JESUS IS OUR EXAMPLE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

A thousand years before he was born, it was prophesied of Jesus: "You love righteousness and hate wickedness" (Psalm 45:7). It was also prophesied that: "With righteousness He shall judge the poor and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; He shall strike the earth with the rod of His mouth and with the breath of His lips He shall slay the wicked. Righteousness shall be the belt of His loins, and faithfulness the belt of His waist" (Isaiah 11:4-5).

Jesus is our best example of righteousness, but do you know what righteousness is? It is the same thing as justice, only on a personal level. It is not just treating others fairly or rightly but also doing right yourself. In his life here, Christ treated people fairly, did what was right, judged evil and defended the innocent. His righteousness includes retribution for evil committed. He is a just judge who is involved in the fight between good and evil. In this sense he is not impartial. He wants good to prevail over evil. Jesus loves what is right but hates what is wrong. It ought to be important for us to know that Jesus always did and will always do what is right.

Jesus Christ, the righteous One, always did what God wanted. Even the thief on the cross had to confess: "we are condemned justly, for we receive the due reward of our deeds; but this Man has done nothing wrong" (Luke 23:41). Because he was righteous, he could say: "Satan has no claim on me" (John 14:30). He always did what was right before God. He showed his righteousness when he expelled the moneychangers from the temple. He could not allow people to turn his Father's house into a den of thieves (Matthew 21:13).

Jesus never rejected a person because of his past mistakes (Matthew 9:13) nor abandoned truth for traditions that would deny help to the needy (Matthew 12:1-2). He gave honor to his companions (Matthew 11:11-12) and shared the truth with others (Matthew 13). In every word and deed, Jesus showed us the perfect example of what it means to be righteous.

Jesus is our example of maturity (Ephesians 4:15). He is the source of our strength and fruit (John 15:1-5). As he did, we must desire the fellowship of the family of God (Hebrew 10:23-27), feeding ourselves on the Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16, 17), sharing our possessions with others (2 Corinthians 9:7-10). We must obey God instead of men (Acts 4:19). This is the life that Jesus revealed to us.

Christ's righteousness is also seen in his role of Judge. "God has established a day when He will judge the world with righteousness through Jesus" (Acts 17:31). When he comes in judgment, he will divide the sheep from the goats. "We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad" (2 Corinthians 5:10). What will the Righteous Judge say to you on that day?

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Jesus so emphasized the absolute necessity of righteousness in our lives that he said: "Unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 5:20). He then proceeded to explain how to practice this righteousness. See some things he pointed out in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5, 6 and 7) that are involved in a righteous life:

1. Be merciful (5:7)
2. Be pure (5:9)
3. Make peace (5:9)
4. Illuminate the world (5:14)
5. Control your anger (5:21, 22)
6. Control your passion (5:27, 28)
7. Be faithful in marriage (5:31, 32)
8. Be honest (5:33-34)
9. Consider the well being of others (5:38-42)
10. Love your enemies (5:43-48)
11. Serve God from pure motives (6:1-18)
12. Forgive others (6:14, 15)
13. Don't be materialistic (6:19-24)
14. Seek God and His kingdom first (6:25-34)
15. Don't be hypocritical in judgment (7:1-5)
16. Value holy things (7:6)
17. Treat others the way you want to be treated (7:13)

18. Obey Christ (7:21-27)

The Christian life is a life of righteousness, good works, and obedience and even more, these works have to be done for pure motives. Jesus said in Matthew 6:1 for us to not practice our righteousness to be seen by people. All we do we should do before God to please Him, knowing that He will reward us.

SELF-EXAMINATION:

Answer these questions to measure your own level of righteousness:

1. Have you ever deceived someone on purpose but did not repent of doing it?
2. Is there anyone in your life that you refuse to forgive?
3. Are you constantly making decisions based on "What would Jesus do in my place?"
4. Do you concern yourself with widows, orphans and the poor?
5. Are you strengthening your spiritual life with prayer, Bible study and fellowship with the church?
6. Do you think you deserve God's favor because of your good life?
7. Do you judge people by their clothes, language, race or nationality?
8. Do you think that a criminal can become a good person and important in the kingdom of God?

JESUS: THE MERCIFUL (Matthew 5:7)

CHAPTER 5

MERCY: WHAT IS IT?

Jesus defined mercy with a story: "There was a certain king (Matthew 18:23-35) who decided to settle accounts with his servants. He discovered that one servant owed him 10,000 talents - a small fortune. The servant would never be able to repay what he owed - not ever. The king, then, ordered his men: "Throw him into the dungeon; sell all his possessions, including his wife and children!" The servant begged him, "My lord, please be patient with me. I will pay it all back. I just need some time." That plea touched the king's heart and - surprise of surprises - he ended up canceling the entire debt. The servant left jumping and shouting for joy! Soon, however, he came across a fellow servant who owed him some money. It was just a little sum, but the first servant demanded immediate payment. Even though it was a small debt, that servant was unable to pay it. The first servant, the one who had been forgiven such a large debt, then commanded that servant to be thrown into the dungeon until he paid what he owed." Now in this story, who was merciful - the king or the first servant? Of course, it was the king, because he was touched by the difficult situation of the debtor and did something to alleviate his suffering.

Jesus went walking with his disciples one day (Matthew 12:1-2) on the Sabbath (the Jewish day of rest). It was lunchtime and the disciples were hungry. They came upon a field of corn ready to be harvested. There arose the drama: hungry men, gazing on a field of ripe corn, and a group of Pharisees watching this group of Jesus' disciples and thinking: "It is the Sabbath. It is not permitted to work on the Sabbath. Watch them closely to see if they pick some corn to eat. If they do, we've got them!" Now what is Jesus going to do? Will he be considerate of the needs of his disciples and draw the criticism of his enemies? Or will he give in to the man-made traditions and let his men go hungry? What would mercy do? The answer is obvious.

The merciful one defined as his priority the needs of men. Actually, this in no way violated God's law which was given to bless people. It only conflicted with the traditions of those legalistic hypocrites who invented rules and burdens that not even they were able to bear. Mercy attends to the needs of people ahead of man-made rules and customs.

Religion without mercy is empty and dead and is not from God. Nobody who excludes mercy from their life can claim that they are following Jesus. To be or not to be merciful is no insignificant matter. In the judgment, Christ will say to the unmerciful: "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit

Me.' Then they also will answer Him, saying, 'Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You?' Then He will answer them, saying, 'Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.'" (Matthew 25:41-45). Mercy is an essential part of true Christianity.

"Blessed are the merciful because they will receive mercy", said Jesus. Mercy is when we feel the pain of someone in a bad situation. It is not, though, only feeling the pain, but acting to alleviate and help. We all feel pain and necessity sometimes. No doubt, we need an encouraging word or a kind gesture. People around us also feel these same things and need that kind word and helping hand.

In Matthew 5:7, Jesus taught us that God would reward our care and affection for others. We will "receive mercy". Jesus said in Matthew 6:14 that "if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you." The merciful person really will be blessed. He will feel that his life is worth something and also will be certain that the God who rewards is observing him with great pleasure.

JESUS IS OUR EXAMPLE OF MERCY

No one measures up to Jesus. He went through life with an agenda full of important tasks but always found the time to stop and tend to the needs of those around him. To help someone else wasn't a waste of time for Jesus. His priorities were so different from those of the world. Coming down from the mountain after delivering a powerful sermon, he met a leper who said, "Lord, if You are willing, You can make me clean." Jesus put out His hand and touched him, saying, "I am willing; be cleansed" (Matthew 8:3). That scene was repeated for over three years during Christ's ministry on earth.

Constantly responding to requests that we might find inconvenient, we never read in the Bible that Jesus ever met a needy person asking for help and he failed to help them. To at the very end, we see Christ, crucified on the cross of Calvary, dying in anguish between two thieves. He had his hands full with his own problems but, hearing the thief's request, he felt great compassion. Though he himself was suffering pain and humiliation, he was able to forgive the thief. That is our Jesus! He looked down upon us, with the guilt of so many sins committed against Our Heavenly Father, and he still descended to this dirty little ball of clay to live among sinners like you and me, just because we needed his infinite mercy.

Now then, how do we feel toward those people who cover themselves with the filth of this world and the stench of sin? Knowing that they will have nothing to eat tomorrow and a fate worse than death awaits them in the judgment, will we reach out to assist? Jesus did. If we want to live the life of Christ, we will also reach out to help.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

We must challenge ourselves to ask in every situation, "What would Jesus do?" Would Jesus forgive the one who offended him or nailed him to the wall? Would he give another chance to the one who failed him? Would he be patient with the slow to learn? Would he give a helping hand to pull someone out of the mire of iniquity? If you know the answer, then just do it too!

According to Mark 4:24, to show mercy means to attend to the needs of people around us. Mercy always walks with open eyes and acts at the smallest cry for help. This happens daily with us and we will perceive it if we are open to it. We cross paths with faces marked by pain, anxiety, fear and sadness. Sensing that there is something wrong that needs attention, we have two options: remain indifferent to the one who is suffering or draw near for the purpose of helping. We have in Jesus a perfect model for mercy because everything in his life was a reflection of his Father. It was Jesus who said, "Be merciful, just like your Father in heaven is merciful" (Luke 6:36).

We may sometimes want to excuse our negligence by saying to ourselves that we don't know the person. In Luke 10:25-35, Jesus teaches us about this pre-planned isolation tactic. It is the story of the "Good Samaritan".

Notice that two Jews (both were religious types) went down the same road as the wounded man but purposefully passed by on the other side. They had an opportunity to stop and help but they didn't. Maybe it was the worries of life, fear of a trap, tiredness after a day's work or maybe it was simply indifference. Whatever the excuse, the result was still "no action". The Good Samaritan, though, was a busy man, on his way to fulfill responsibilities and obligations, but he put it all on hold to stop and help a person in need. We need to keep our eyes open to such opportunities. When the Samaritan saw the man, he drew near, wanting to see the need instead of wanting to hide from it. We too are always being presented with opportunities like this. What moves us to act is not our education, talent, social class or financial resources. It is a heart filled with mercy.

The Samaritan came to the wounded man without fear and without shame. The ones who should feel fear and shame are those who see but do not stop to help. The church is not a monastery into which we flee the harsh realities of life. To the contrary, we are a body of action. The Samaritan was not afraid of blood. He applied the medicine and touched the wounds. The Christian can't be afraid of blood. Some people, facing a person in need, ask, "What will I receive in return for helping?" Others say, "There is no hope; I would be wasting my time." The merciful, though, keeps on helping. Race, skin color or religion does not matter. The good Samaritan did not ask for social security number, income tax statement, three references of merit or driver's license in order to decide if he would stop and help or not. The man was wounded, it was urgent, and so he helped!

What would you do if you went down a main road and saw a gravely wounded person at one o'clock in the morning? Showing mercy sometimes involves risks. Robbers, hiding behind the next boulder, could have attacked that Samaritan but his mercy and compassion were greater than the risks. How much greater were the mercy and compassion of Jesus when he went to that cruel, shameful cross in order to save us from our fatal spiritual wounds?

There is an ancient tradition that a woman among the multitude, having mercy on Jesus as he treaded the painful way of the cross, took a towel and dried his face. The gesture of that woman did not end his sufferings but Christ was so touched that he left his face print impressed on that towel. That story is just a legend, but it is true that any kindness or act of mercy we do for others, because of the Lord, leaves a lasting impression on our souls and often on the souls of those who we helped. We all know that, faced with the enormity of the sufferings and need of people, the resources we have to give seem like nothing. Sometimes the only thing we can offer is a friendly word and a gesture of mercy. Who among us would dare to deny even that?

The gospel of Luke tells that while Christ was in the garden of Gethsemane, immersed in anguish to the point of sweating something like drops of blood, "an angel appeared to Him from heaven, comforting Him" (Luke 22:43). That angel did not change his destiny or death, nor alter his decision to go forward. His determination to die on the cross in order to be able to remove our sins continued and he did die a terrible death. Could it be that that comforting and strengthening from the angel was wasted time? Was it in vain that Jesus died on the cross to show his mercy for a sinful race? Of course not! It is never in vain when we show mercy for a suffering, needy, scared or lost person.

I was sitting on the patio early one morning at a friend's house on a Lake in Kentucky. As I enjoyed that moment, I thought to myself: "All this is so beautiful: the air is fresh and crisp. The lake is still like a mirror, the sounds of the birds are like a symphony, the trees are green and lush, even the rustic house with flowers planted in every nook and cranny, the patio - it is all beautiful and pleasant. Even the rocking chair I sit in is comfortable. What a privilege to be able to talk to my Creator within my heart and mind. All of life is good."

Then this little old sick poodle-looking dog comes up and stands in front of me. "I know what he wants - affection. He wants to be petted, touched. He really wants to sit in my lap, but he's 13 years old, crippled, going blind and deaf, sick and he smells like death warmed over. He smells like road-kill - and I don't want him to touch me. Not even rub against my pants leg. And I sure don't want to touch him. He stinks." That little old stinking puppy was road-kill just waiting to lie down in the middle of the road.

Jesus cares about human road kill. Not possums, flattened out on the highway with a circle of buzzards around him digging into the feast before them. Not even the deer that could have been in your freezer, cut and wrapped in wax paper for future meals if a car had not gotten to him first. The world is full of old, diseased, lonely, addicted, divorced, downtrodden, sinners, dirty people and we may think - don't touch me. I don't want to hold you in my lap. They are road kill - flattened out on the road of life but the muscle we call the heart keeps on beating. It matters to Him when people go to bed at night with stomachs growling from hunger and lips that are dry and parched from thirst; when people sleep under the bridges and remain on the outside of home and society; when they shiver in the cold on long winter nights or lie in pain on hospital beds or sit staring at the walls of a jail cell.

It matters to Jesus when people are lonely, when poor, dirty beggars come into the assembly, when children have mental disorders and when, teens who driven by hormones have messed up big time. They may be Mary Magdalene, or the leper, or Zacchaeus the publican, or the woman with a hemorrhage of blood, or the crazy man of the Gadarenes. This is not just about Jesus. It is about you and me. I didn't pet that dog but God help me if I refuse to take the humans who are road-kill into my arms and treat them with kindness and love. Jesus calls us to reach out to touch the least, the lost and the lonely.

Make the decision now that you will stop and help the needy, the stranger, the rejected, and the lonely; that you will loan to the one who cannot repay you, forgive the one who offended you, give another chance to the one who failed, treat the back-slidden, weak, inactive, slow brother with kindness and love; that you will not crush the defeated and ignorant; not nail to the wall the brother who yielded to temptation; that you will do something to alleviate the suffering of the homeless and abandoned and look at every human being as if it were Jesus who is needing your help.

SELF-EXAMINATION:

Answer these questions in order to measure your own level of mercy:

1. Do you invite people to your home that cannot return the favor?
2. Do you set aside some money each week to help the poor?
3. Is it hard for you to forgive someone who hurt you?
4. Have you talked to an unbeliever this week in a way that might draw them toward the Lord?
5. Do you feel grateful for all the Lord has done for you?
6. Do you visit the sick at home or in the hospital?
7. Would you give another chance to the person who robbed you?
8. Are you able to forget the wrongs that people have done to you?
9. Do you avoid talking to poor people?
10. Have you already received the mercy of God?

JESUS: THE PURE (Matthew 5:8)

CHAPTER 6

PURITY: WHAT IS IT?

Many people have a wrong idea about what it means to be a believer. One such person asked if he was a believer, answered: "Yes, I am a believer because I don't drink, smoke, dance or gamble." What mattered to him was a list of prohibitions, but the law of Christ always emphasized more what you do and what you are like on the inside than things you don't do. Your behavior should be and will be a simple reflection of what exists in your heart. The importance of personal, inner qualities is shown in the following common saying:

"Plant thoughts and you will reap your actions.
Plant actions and you will reap your habits.
Plant habits and you will reap your character.
Plant character and you will reap your destiny."

Really, it all starts with thoughts. "For as a man thinks in his heart, so is he." (Proverbs 23:7). Acts are not the most important thing. Sure, your actions are important, but the fact is that "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart brings forth evil. For out of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaks" (Luke 6:45). The main emphasis of spiritual development must always be the inner person; that is, the heart.

Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God." The coin of purity of which Jesus spoke in Matthew 5:8 has two sides: morality and sincerity. The word here translated "pure" is the Greek word *katharos*, which is defined as pure, clean, unsoiled, uncontaminated, sincere, upright, and void of evil. Jesus said in Matthew 15:19, that " ... out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. These are the things which defile a man."

Impurity is to look at a woman with illicit desires (Matthew 5:28) while purity is just the opposite.

Purity involves sincerity of motives. Even the word "sincere" comes from Latin words meaning "without wax". This refers to the ancient custom of hiding the flaws in a work of art with wax, trying to deceive the buyer. A good piece was without wax; that is, sincere, meaning that it was 100% or without contamination. Like pure honey or pure milk, what is in the bottle is what is written on the label. Jesus responded to the hypocrites so much because they were "like whitewashed tombs which indeed appear beautiful outwardly, but inside are full of dead men's bones and all uncleanness." and "outwardly appear righteous to men, but inside [were] are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness" (Matthew 23:27). "The Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7). It is not height, muscular strength, talent, charisma nor clothes that define a man. It is the heart. May we be pure in heart.

JESUS IS OUR EXAMPLE OF PURITY

The perfect and pure life of Christ was living proof that we can also be pure. He lived in the flesh but did not give himself to the impure desires of the flesh. He never sinned. He never looked at a woman with impure intentions. He never acted falsely.

Of those who followed him, none ever questioned his conduct. His enemies accused him of blasphemy because he claimed that he and the Father were one. His enemies were always trying to catch him in some contradiction but they never did. Not once! He had a life of suffering and temptation but he never failed. He could say: "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness"(John 8:12). He asked: "Who among you accuses me of sin?" (John 8:46) and the answer was only silence. When one of his chosen Apostles took money to betray Jesus, the only useful information he could offer to Jesus' enemies was the place he would go to pray. Jesus was exactly what he appeared to be and what he professed to be.

Christ had no ulterior or selfish motives. He did not use flattery to win over followers or facilitate his mission. His sincerity cost him dearly but to the Pharisees he spoke the truth, even when they didn't like it. To Pilate, who had the power to kill him or set him free, he confessed that he was king and had all authority. He did attract attention, but his reason for helping people was because he felt compassion for them. The Pharisees would give the poor man a coin but only after they had tooted their own horn to call everyone's attention. Jesus healed the sick and raised the dead and instructed them to not tell anybody. What a difference! Jesus gave us the perfect example of sincerity, purity, holiness and humility. "Create in me a pure heart, Oh God!" (Psalm 51:10). And may we add: "May the life of Christ be my life, too!"

PERSONAL APPLICATION

This teaching of Jesus tells us that we must have pure motives for all we do. If we do something good but in our hearts we do it because we want the praise of men, we will be like the Pharisees of Jesus' time. They gave alms to the poor, prayed long prayers and even fasted but did all that to be seen by people. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 13 about those who sold their possessions to give to the poor and even gave up their bodies to be

burned but for the lack of the correct motive (love), it was worth nothing. Let's be careful to do good works, but motivated by love for God and for others.

We should also remember that, as Christians, we are the light of the world. The only chance the world has to climb out of the moral gutter in which it lives is for Christians show a more excellent way. If there is no difference between the world and us, then it means we are a part of the world. If we read the same books and magazines, see the same movies, wear the same clothes, tell the same jokes and participate in the same amusements as the people who walk in darkness, we are not being pure in the eyes of God.

A good rule of thumb that always helps us make good decisions is to ask: "What would Jesus do in my place?" There is a similar question we can ask to help us stay pure in heart: "Would I be ashamed for Jesus to know my acts, thoughts and motives?" Of course, Jesus does already know our thoughts and motives. We just need to remember that he does and we need to desire to please him. "There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account" (Heb 4:13). Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God.

The main thing that keeps us from having a pure heart is sin, specifically, hidden sin (Psalm 32:3). We must honestly face up to and eliminate sin from our lives. So many people, afraid of the reaction of others, refuse to admit that there is sin in their hearts, so they spend their lives struggling and pretending to appear to be something they are not. We appreciate pure water, pure milk or pure honey. They are 100% what they appear to be and are claimed to be. The same is true of a pure heart. Possibly, we have come to grips with a God who searches our hearts and knows just what is inside, but what makes us so afraid to be perfectly transparent to those around us? Is it fear that, if others really knew us as we are, they would mock, scorn, despise and reject us? Those are the same fears that produced the pharisaical, hypocritical hearts of Jesus' day. Don't you sometimes long to be so clean inside that you would not be ashamed for any and all to know you as you really are? What a relief that would be! "Create in me a pure heart, oh God. Let me be like you in all my ways." (Psalm 51:10)

SELF-EXAMINATION:

Answer these questions in order to measure your own level of purity:

1. What do you think of a person who has a pure heart?
2. Would you be ashamed for your friends to know your thoughts?
3. Are you walking in the light of God?
4. Would you be ashamed for the brethren to know the books you read or the films you watch?
5. Do you enjoy indecent or suggestive jokes?
6. Do you consider yourself to be a sincere person?
7. Can you say that you hate evil?
8. Do you lie to people in order to not offend them?
9. Do you think it is right to dress sensually so people are attracted to your body?
10. Do you do good deeds in order to be seen by others?

JESUS: THE PEACEMAKER (Matthew 5:9)

CHAPTER 7

PEACEMAKER: WHAT IS IT?

For many years a large silver star adorned the top of the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem. One day, back in the 1800's, the Roman Catholic Church, which shared a part of the building with a Greek Orthodox Church, decided to take down the silver star and replace it with their own star. But the Greek Orthodox Church refused to let them. The Greek Orthodox Church was supported by Russia and France supported the Roman Catholic Church, but it was Turkey who actually ruled over Palestine at that time. When Turkey sided with the Roman Catholic Church, Russia declared war on Turkey. Immediately France and England allied themselves with

Turkey and fought what history calls the Crimean War. It lasted over three years, from 1853 to 1856. At the end of that war the star came down.

Isn't it ironic that in the very place of the birth of the Prince of Peace there has almost always been conflict and war? When TV cameras take us to Bethlehem almost any Christmas season, we will see armed soldiers watching over the crowds that gather to worship the Prince of Peace.

It is estimated that in all the history of humanity less than eight percent of recorded history can be described as times of peace. In the last 32 centuries there have been fewer than 300 years of peace. Historians tell us that within the last 300 years there have been 286 wars in Europe alone.

In the 20th century, the iron curtain fell in Eastern Europe. For many years, they had lived in apparent peace among themselves. However, now freed from the rule of the Soviets who dominated them, various ethnic groups returned to the old bitterness and hatred and the mutual killing began anew. The truth is that human beings, on our own, do not get along well with each other. Our courts are full of those who cannot get along, so they go to court to find someone to resolve the differences between them. We fight and we bicker. We criticize each other. We tear each other down. On our own, we have difficulty living in harmony and peace with one another.

Epictetus, a philosopher of the first century, wrote in reference to the *Pax Romana* - the Roman peace that existed in the civilized world at the time and about which the Caesar boasted - "While the emperor may give peace from war on land and sea, he is unable to give peace from passion, grief and envy. He cannot give peace of heart, for which man yearns more than even for outward peace."

To most people, peace is simply "the absence of strife." If there are no wars, we say the world is at peace; or if we aren't fighting with our neighbors, we have neighborhood peace. But peace in the scriptures is far more than that. In the O.T., peace is *shalom* which means "wholeness, completeness, harmony of life." In the N.T. the Greek word for peace is *eirene* meaning "inner well-being." Putting them all together, peace can be defined as "inner calm, even in the midst of outward turmoil or calamity." To enjoy peace is to be in harmony with God, self and others.

It is important to know that peace in the Bible carries the idea of reconciliation. It is not just declaring a cease-fire but a uniting of the armies. It isn't just not fighting in front of the kids but starting to love one another. It isn't just closing the doors to shut out the noise on the street but finding an inner tranquility in your spirit that remains though surrounded by turmoil. True peace comes when friendship is re-established between you and God, others and your own self.

There is only true peace when love takes the place of hatred. The peacemaker is the one who works to replace hatred and strife with love and unity.

JESUS IS OUR EXAMPLE OF A PEACEMAKER

The daily headlines of almost any newspaper tell about wars, crime, violence and hatred. In the midst of such confusion and strife, can it be that there is a place of quiet rest, peace and tranquility, safety, a true paradise here on earth? Such a place does indeed exist and, better still, is accessible to all. This place is in Christ and the one who created this peace is Jesus himself. In fact, Jesus is our peace. Into this squabbling, war-torn world, God sent His personal, visible representative of "peace on earth, good will toward men."

Isaiah prophesied about Jesus: "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end, Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever. The zeal of the LORD of hosts will perform this." (Isaiah 9:6, 7)

This helps us understand God's grand plan to establish peace among men here on earth. God's plan was called a "Mystery" and "God's Eternal Purpose". It is to do nothing less than unite all kinds of people in a kingdom of peace, love and righteousness through Jesus Christ the King. Isaiah 11:1-10 described this kingdom 650 years before it was established. He used symbolic terms: "... The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb... the cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together... They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea. "Those who by nature would once kill and devour each other are transformed into harmless, loving beings. Can you see how true peace only is possible when people come to know the Lord? This is where "Jesus, the Prince of Peace" comes in. This is why it is so essential for us to know Christ and his life.

Ephesians 2:11-16 shows how Jesus is the great peacemaker. Read this passage and see how he destroyed the enmity that separated Jews and Gentiles in one body. Jesus' effect on these natural enemies was fantastic. People of different cultures, languages, races, religions, customs, etc., who had centuries of history full of war after war - Jesus caused them to become beloved brothers. The instrument he used to make peace was the cross of Calvary. The vision is of Jesus walking through the desert. In front of him all is dead and brown. But on he walks and wherever he passes, he leaves love, peace and harmony. The desert comes to life and is transformed into a beautiful, lush garden: birds singing, flowers blooming, water running, green pastures. In reality, that's exactly what Jesus did, but in spiritual terms.

Jesus embraced the worst sinner, touched the vilest leper, purified the most despicable prostitute, took all types of people and joined them together into one beautiful family of God. He paid a high price but saw his mission as a peacemaker as a priority in his life.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

The job of a peacemaker is to reconcile men to God, with other human beings and with their own selves. When Jesus spoke these words, the world was divided. One race hated other races, one nation hated other nations, and people of one religion hated other religions. An example of this is the feelings between Jews and Gentiles. The Jewish man thanked God for not being a Gentile, a slave or a woman. He despised the half-breed Samaritans, even to the point of walking many miles out of his way to avoid contact.

Today, it is the white and the black, rich and poor, learned and illiterate, north and south, socialist and capitalist, liberal and conservative, Islamic and Jewish. Human nature has not changed. Christians must be instruments of peace, serving God's plan to establish peace between people of all groups. Sadly, some who call themselves Christians, instead of making peace, often sow discord and division. We all should be ashamed of this situation that is so contrary to the growth of Christ's kingdom. Let us dedicate our lives to peacemaking. That way we will be the children of God.

The night he was betrayed by Judas, when Jesus prayed to the Father in favor of his disciples, he asked: "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me" (John 17:21). Yet today when unbelievers observe the multitude of different denominations, each one claiming he is following Jesus, it is no wonder that many do not care about listening to their message. This sad situation has even arrived at the absurd extreme in history of "Christians" killing "Christians". Enough of this! The peacemaker fights for, defends, and promotes peace and not division. To Christ's followers was given the job of creating peace; that is, bringing people into reconciliation with one another. "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation. Now then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God were pleading through us: we implore you on Christ's behalf, be reconciled to God. For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (2 Corinthians 5:18-20).

To be a peacemaker means to evangelize, to tell the good news of the love of God and the forgiveness of sins through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. The solution for family feuds, racial strife and civil conflict is the gospel. Two people only come into fellowship with God when they are in fellowship with each other. Peace does not come by political party, economic system, national flag or the United Nations. Jesus is the One who brings peace (John 14:27). Our job is to spread the peace that Jesus gives. This is work for us all.

Just like Jesus dedicated his own life to peacemaking, we should dedicate our lives to bringing peace to the world, but peace that is true and eternal, men reconciled to God through Jesus Christ.

SELF-EXAMINATION:

Answer these questions to measure your own level of peacemaking:

1. Are you at peace with God?
2. Are you at peace with yourself?
3. Do you live at peace with your neighbor?
4. Do you participate in or promote a religious division - denomination?
5. Have you shared the gospel with someone lately?
6. Do you enjoy seeing people fight?
7. When someone is mad at you do you talk to them to try to resolve the problem?
8. When you try to help people who are squabbling, do you mention Christ to them?
9. Do you take the initiative to resolve problems?
10. Have you ever helped someone find the peace that is available in Christ?

JESUS: THE FAITHFUL (Matthew 5:10)

CHAPTER 8

FAITHFULNESS: WHAT IS IT?

A person's true character is most clearly revealed when that person is feeling the pressures of life. When everything is pleasant and easy, free of irritations, insults and injuries, it isn't very hard to be good and kind, patient and agreeable. But in the midst of persecution, pain, illness, criticism and rejection, a man's true colors come to the surface. It is in these moments that some appear as light in the darkness and others just blend into that darkness. It is in these moments that some give up and others keep going.

If you leave all to follow Jesus, only try to help others and dedicate yourself wholly to God, but then suffer some great loss, you may be tempted to think, "What good does it do to serve God? Is it worth trying to be a good person?" or "My life was better before I gave it to God." But what is missing if you succumb to such thoughts? It is simply this: You lack faith or trust in God and His promises. The truth is that God never promised us a rose garden. To the contrary, He only promised that He would always be with us to give us strength and that, if we remain faithful unto death, we will receive a reward beyond our wildest dreams. But it takes faithfulness to receive that reward. The quality we need to possess in our lives is faithfulness to God, to Christ and to our own convictions.

"Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matthew 5:10). The quality of life seen here, in a person's reacting to persecution with rejoicing, is faithfulness or faith in the promises of God.

JESUS IS OUR EXAMPLE OF FAITHFULNESS

Jesus Christ is our best example of faithfulness. Satan threw his most fiery darts at Jesus. His enemies tried to kill him. Religious leaders falsely accused him. His own people rejected him. He could even say that "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." The words of Isaiah 53:1-12 describe his sufferings: "... There is no beauty that we should desire Him ... He is despised and

rejected by men ... He was despised, and we did not esteem Him ... He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows ... stricken, smitten by God ... afflicted ... wounded ... bruised ... oppressed ... cut off from the land of the living ..."

Think about how he was tortured, despised and then nailed to a cross as you read these words from Isaiah 50:6,7 "I gave My back to those who struck Me, And My cheeks to those who plucked out the beard; I did not hide My face from shame and spitting. For the Lord GOD will help Me; Surely the Lord GOD will help Me". Can you begin to see how a person can really get beat up and still trust in God? Jesus did that. We can also, by God's loving grace, if we hang on to our faith.

Jesus wasn't weak or defenseless. He had shown signs and wonders to all so they could see his power. He came to suffer in our stead so he offered his back to the stripes of evil men and his face to the spittle of insults and the fists of cruelty. The Son of God was not ashamed of humiliation. We can see in all this how faithfulness is so closely tied to persecution. Even being the target of torture, he was determined to fulfill his mission to the very end. In everything, Jesus continued faithful to the Father and so the Father said of him "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" (Matthew 17:5)

Arrested and tortured, Jesus did not turn back. Abandoned by his closest friends, he did not turn back. Is it worthwhile to surrender ourselves to Christ? The answer is a resounding "Yes!" We may be weak and frail but Jesus is faithful to those who want to follow him. The sorrows of this life do not compare to the future glory that God will give to those who are faithful to Him.

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Persecution may come to us in various forms nowadays. It can be violence, social rejection, criticism, ridicule or loss of property or livelihood. In the primitive church, it was much more drastic. Many Christians lost all they owned. Hebrews 10:32-34 is very instructive on this subject: "But recall the former days in which, after you were illuminated, you endured a great struggle with sufferings: partly while you were made a spectacle both by reproaches and tribulations, and partly while you became companions of those who were so treated; for you had compassion on me in my chains, and joyfully accepted the plundering of your goods, knowing that you have a better and an enduring possession for yourselves in heaven. Therefore do not cast away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise: 'For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.' But we are not of those who draw back to perdition, but of those who believe to the saving of the soul."

They were put in prison. Some would be coated with tar by Roman soldiers, tied to posts and burned alive to illuminate the imperial gardens of the Emperor Nero. Some were thrown into large sacks with poisonous snakes, cast into lions' dens or torn in two by horses. Thousands died confessing "Jesus is my Lord!" They were faithful in persecution.

When you are being persecuted, there are several good ways to react:

1. Sometimes, it's good to just walk away. Jesus did (Matt. 12:14, 15).
2. It is always appropriate to do good (Acts 5:28, 29, 40-42).
3. Never seek revenge (Romans 12:19).
4. Be positive and do good to your enemies (Romans 12:20).
5. Keep on walking in the path of righteousness, doing God's will. "Be faithful unto death" (Revelation 3:10).
6. Know that God will reward you (Matthew 5:10-12).

SELF-EXAMINATION:

Answer these questions to measure your own level of faithfulness:

1. Have you ever been persecuted for being a Christian and you reacted by complaining and grumbling?
2. Do you refrain from sharing Christ with others because you are afraid that people will make fun of you?

3. Do you pray for your enemies?
4. Are you seen by others as a positive or a negative person, an optimist or a pessimist?
5. Do you quit doing some good deed when others don't agree or don't appreciate what you are doing?
6. Do you find yourself wanting revenge against your persecutors?
7. Does the possibility that your persecutors might become Christians and receive salvation make you happy?
8. Are you ashamed to be different from the world?
9. Do you ever think that God doesn't care that you are suffering injustice?
10. Are you able to love people who do not love you?

CONCLUSION

One of the most profound truths revealed in the Bible is that Jesus of Nazareth, born 2,000 years ago in Bethlehem, was and is, in fact, God! When he was born it was to a virgin and the angel who announced his conception said he would be called Immanuel, meaning, "God with us". Of his entrance into the world it was written: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God ... And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." (1 John 1:1, 14) When Philip asked him "Lord, show us the Father", Jesus replied: "Have I been with you so long, and yet you have not known Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father." Surely, we recognize our fragile and humble state as human beings, but God considered us to be of such great value that He visited us! Do you want to see God? Look at Jesus! Jesus was God who came to be with us in a very personal and comforting way.

But Jesus went away. Can it be that God is still with us? The Bible answer is a clearly - Yes! But how so? It is through his Spirit. Listen to Jesus' words from John 14: "And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever; the Spirit of truth ... you know Him, for He dwells with you and will be in you." "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him."

The conclusion is inescapable. God our Creator thought so much of us that He came to earth in human form to help us. We called him Jesus of Nazareth. He returned to heaven after completing his mission here but sent the Holy Spirit to help us. And so today, God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit want to make their home within us. They want to personally reside in you. They want us to participate in their life.

The life of Christ is the life that Jesus lived and the kind of life we also can live with His help, if we want to. If we do want to live that life, we have to look to Him. Read Hebrews 12:1-2: "... run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who ... endured the cross..." Jesus started the spiritual life that surges through us and he will finish it. He is our Example to follow, our Strength when we are weary, our Coach cheering us on and our Redeemer welcoming us into His arms at the finish line.

Consider all who were against Him and the price He paid to do His Father's will. See how God brought forth greatness through the cross, through suffering, and through death. When you think about your own suffering, the abuse you have suffered, how you have been used and abused and how awful it is -it is no wonder you can't face it - ... look to the cross and see the Man they stripped naked and hung there for all to look upon and laugh at.

When you think about life's inequities, the unfairness of the cards you were dealt and you feel like singing another "somebody done somebody wrong song" ... look to the cross and see the One who was scourged for our iniquities.

When you sting from the rejection you've known, the pain of being "not wanted" or of having your love spurned ... look to the cross and see love flowing down from the Wounded One who was despised and rejected.

When you're afraid, when God is silent, when life slaps you around and the thorns dig deep, when you have given your best but your best isn't enough ... look to the cross!

When your body is wracked with pain, the guilt of your sins is ever before you and you think you can't go on and you want to quit or compromise ... look to the cross! See Jesus. He did it! He overcame! He can see you through too!

Do you remember the fairy tale about a handsome young prince who was transformed into an ugly old toad? He would forever remain in that form unless kissed by a beautiful princess. He spent his days in a dark pond, sad and depressed. What hope was there for freedom? His big eyes bulged, his skin was rough, clammy and warty, his body jerked spasmodically and his mouth was always wet with dripping saliva. Who would ever want to kiss him? Certainly not a beautiful princess!

But, one day, a princess did come to the pond. She was full of love and joy, seeing beauty in everything that God had created. She spied the old toad but did not find him repulsive. In fact, she picked him up, looked into his old sad eyes and planted a kiss right on his head. Instantly he was restored into a handsome prince. They fell in love, married and lived happily ever after. Of course, that is just a fable, but in real life, it is the story of the life of Christ. While on earth, Jesus walked all over Judea, Samaria and Galilee "kissing frogs". He touched. He taught. He healed. He transformed ... lost people ... like Zacchaeus, the tax collector. Kicked out of church, branded a traitor in an occupied country, eternally linked to the name of "sinner", he was so short that he climbed up into a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus as he passed by. Jesus stopped at the tree and invited himself to Zacchaeus' house for lunch and before the day ended, Jesus had transformed that little "toad" into a prince.

Again and again, the story was the same. Christ accepted the outcast, gave strength to the weak, loved the unlovely, and gave a second chance to the failure. In fact, I too was an ugly old toad until Jesus kissed me. What about you? Would you like to be transformed into the image of Christ and live the "life of Christ"? That's what all these lessons are about.

In Matthew 5, Jesus gives us what amounts to a self-portrait. These are traits every Christian should and could possess: humility, compassion, meekness, righteousness, mercy, peace making and faithfulness. This is not a list where you can pick and choose, according to your personal preference or inclination. It is not like a buffet restaurant with a table full of kinds of food and people choose only what they want: "Look, I want to be merciful, peaceful and meek, but I don't like being humble, pure or righteous." This is a complete picture of a Christian. He doesn't say: "Paul, you be humble; Mary, you be pure; Fred, you be righteous and Anna, you be faithful." To the contrary, every Christian should possess all these qualities and with your permission and cooperation, the Spirit can produce them all in you.

See also that the emphasis is not so much on what we do but how we are (our character). That's because, when we are the right people on the inside, we will end up doing the things we ought to do. "To be" precedes "to do."

NOW DO THIS EXERCISE

Write down a summary of your personal progress in these areas of your Christian life during the last few weeks:

1. Humility
2. Compassion
3. Meekness
4. Righteousness
5. Mercy
6. Purity
7. Peacemaking
8. Faithfulness

APPENDIX 1: HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENTS

Here are some homework exercises to help you put into practice the qualities found in the life of Jesus Christ:

1. Give a big hug to a dirty, downtrodden person.
2. Do some job around the house that you normally do not do.
3. Listen to a child's conversation for 15 minutes.
4. Make a list of 10 things in which you are dependent on God
5. At the end of the day, make a list of 10 things you did wrong that day.
6. Sitting outside at night, make a list of 10 things you do not know.
7. Do a good deed of charity without ever letting anybody know that you did it.
8. Ask for help from somebody who knows less than you do.
9. Smile and ask, "How are you doing?" to 10 people you don't know and listen carefully to their answers.
10. Write down a criticism you received without trying to defend yourself.
11. Brag on 5 people to their face without calling attention to yourself.
12. Ask a coworker or friend to criticize you in some way but don't reply to the criticism or try to defend yourself, except to say, "Thank you, my friend."
13. Spend an hour sitting in the emergency room of a hospital, just observing the suffering of the people there.
14. Review the magazines, videos and music tapes and CDs that you have at home and burn the ones that are indecent.
15. Rebuke or correct a person that you know is doing something wrong or unjust.
16. Go up to a rude, irritating person and ask him how he is doing, what does he need, etc.
17. Make a list of people that you have been mad at and pray for each one of them by name.
18. Go visit an old, lonely person.
19. Invite a poor person to your house to eat a meal with your family.
20. Make a list of 5 attributes of Jesus Christ that are most lacking in your life.

APPENDIX 2: REFERENCED SCRIPTURES

Psalm 51: 17 "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart; These, O God, You will not despise."

Matthew 6:1 "Take heed that you do not do your charitable deeds before men, to be seen by them. Otherwise you have no reward from your Father in heaven."

Matthew 9:13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy and not sacrifice.' For I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners, to repentance."

Matthew 9: 35 Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the gospel of the kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people. 36 But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd."

Matthew 11:11 "Assuredly, I say to you, among those born of women there has not risen one greater than John the Baptist; but he who is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he. 12 And from the days of John the Baptist until now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence, and the violent take it by force.

Matthew 12:1 "At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. And His disciples were hungry, and began to pluck heads of grain and to eat. 2 And when the Pharisees saw it, they said to Him, "Look, Your disciples are doing what is not lawful to do on the Sabbath!"

Matthew 12: 14 Then the Pharisees went out and plotted against Him, how they might destroy Him. 15 But when Jesus knew it, He withdrew from there. And great multitudes followed Him, and He healed them all."

Matthew 13:1 On the same day Jesus went out of the house and sat by the sea. 2 And great multitudes were gathered together to Him, so that He got into a boat and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. 3 Then He spoke many things to them in parables, saying: "Behold, a sower went out to sow. ... 24 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field; 25 but while men slept, his enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way. ... 31 Another parable He put forth to them, saying: "The kingdom of heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and sowed in his field, 32 which indeed is the least of all the seeds; but when it is grown it is greater than the herbs and becomes a tree, so that the birds of the air come and nest in its branches." 33 Another parable He spoke to them: "The kingdom of heaven is like leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till it was all leavened." ... 44 "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field. 45 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls. 46 "who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. 47 Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a dragnet that was cast into the sea and gathered some of every kind, 48 which, when it was full, they drew to shore; and they sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but threw the bad away. ... 51 Jesus said to them, "Have you understood all these things?" They said to Him, "Yes, Lord." 52 Then He said to them, "Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the kingdom of heaven is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old."

Matthew 21:1 Now when they drew near Jerusalem, and came to Bethphage, at the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples, 2 saying to them, "Go into the village opposite you, and immediately you will find a donkey tied, and a colt with her. Loose them and bring them to Me. 3 And if anyone says anything to you, you shall say, 'The Lord has need of them,' and immediately he will send them." 4 All this was done that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: 5 Tell the daughter of Zion, 'Behold, your King is coming to you, Lowly, and sitting on a donkey, A colt, the foal of a donkey.'"

Matthew 21:13 "And He said to them, "It is written, 'My house shall be called a house of prayer,' but you have made it a 'den of thieves.'"

Luke 2: 6 "So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn.

Luke 10: 25 "And behold, a certain lawyer stood up and tested Him, saying, "Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" 26 He said to him, "What is written in the law? What is your reading of it?" 27 So he answered and said, 'You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind,' and 'your neighbor as yourself.' 28 And He said to him, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." 29 But he, wanting to justify himself, said to Jesus, "And who is my neighbor?" 30 Then Jesus answered and said: "A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, who stripped him of his clothing, wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead. 31 Now by chance a certain priest came down that road. And when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. 32 Likewise a Levite, when he arrived at the place, came and looked, and passed by on the other side. 33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was. And when he saw him, he had compassion. 34 So he went to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring on oil and wine; and he set him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. 35 On the next day, when he departed, he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, 'Take care of him; and whatever more you spend, when I come again, I will repay you.' 36 So which of these three do you think was neighbor to him who fell among the thieves?" 37 And he said, "He who showed mercy on him." Then Jesus said to him, "Go and do likewise."

Luke 19:41 Now as He drew near, He saw the city and wept over it 42 saying, "If you had known, even you, especially in this your day, the things that make for your peace! But now they are hidden from your eyes. 43 For days will come upon you when your enemies will build an embankment around you, surround you and close you in on every side, 44 and level you, and your children within you, to the ground; and they will not leave in you one stone upon another, because you did not know the time of your visitation."

Luke 22:27 "For who is greater, he who sits at the table, or he who serves? Is it not he who sits at the table? Yet I am among you as the One who serves."

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

John 13:5 After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded.

John 14:27 Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

John 15:1 I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. 2 "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. 3 You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. 4 Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. 5 I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing."

Acts 4:19 "But Peter and John answered and said to them, "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge."

Acts 5:28 Did we not strictly command you not to teach in this name? And look, you have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this Man's blood on us!" 29 But Peter and the other apostles answered and said: "We ought to obey God rather than men. ... 40 And they agreed with him, and when they had called for the apostles and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go. 41 So they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name. 42 And daily in the temple, and in every house, they did not cease teaching and preaching Jesus as the Christ."

Romans 12:16 "Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion."

Romans 12:19 Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord. 20 Therefore "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; If he is thirsty, give him a drink; For in so doing you will heap coals of fire on his head."

1 Corinthians 5:1 It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles; that a man has his father's wife! 2 And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you.

1 Corinthians 13:3 And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. 4 Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself, is not puffed up; 5 does not behave rudely, does not seek its own, is not provoked, thinks no evil;"

2 Corinthians 5:10 For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad."

2 Corinthians 9:7 So let each one give as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver. 8 And God is able to make all grace abound toward you, that you, always having all sufficiency in all things, may have an abundance for every good work. 9 As it is written: "He has dispersed abroad, He has given to the poor; His righteousness endures forever. 10 Now may He who supplies seed to the sower, and bread for food, supply and multiply the seed you have sown and increase the fruits of your righteousness,

Galatians 5:13 For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.

Galatians 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

Ephesians 4:15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head; Christ.

Ephesians 5:21 submitting to one another in the fear of God.

Philippians 2:3 Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

Philippians 2:5 Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, 6 who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, 7 But made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. 8 And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross.

Colossians 1:16 For by Him all things were created that are in heaven and that are on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers. All things were created through Him and for Him. 17 And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist.

Colossians 3:13 bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do.

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."

Titus 3:1 Remind them to be subject to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, 2 to speak evil of no one, to be peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men."

