



Adult Ministries
Men's Lessons 2022

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Mesoamerica Region

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Church of the Nazarene
Mesoamerica Region



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Study Guide for Men**

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Presentation

The Church of the Nazarene Sunday School and Discipleship Ministry (SDMI) is organized by developing Adult Ministries, Youth Ministries, and Children's Ministries.

This material is a guide for the ministry of MIG: Men in the Image of God, of SDMI, and its objective is to communicate to each Christian and non-Christian man God's message about his relationship with his creator and his leading role in society. This ministry wishes to create awareness in the mind of each man about the image and likeness of God in his life, his holiness.

The areas of this ministry for men and its objectives are as follows:

Spiritual Area:

- Motivate men to be consecrated under the direction of the Holy Spirit.
- Inspire men to do personal evangelism with other men.
- Strengthen men's worship of God and their devotional life.

Ministerial Area:

- Recognize that men have a responsibility for the preservation and growth of the work of God.
- Work in personal and church growth.
- Facilitate the service of men in the church.

Family Area:

- Help men build their homes on the principles and values of the Kingdom of God as shown in the Bible.
- Help men apply biblical principles and values for a good marriage relationship.
- Help men apply biblical principles and values for raising children.

The book contains 12 lessons that can be shared one per month in the men's meetings. Each lesson contains:

Learning objectives.

These refer to the achievements expected of the student at the end of the study.

Introduction.

This is an initial presentation that contextualizes the topic to be addressed in order to engage the men in the topic.

Development of the theme

These lessons have been written in simple, dynamic language and connected with the ideas of the contemporary world in order to facilitate their use for teaching.

Conclusion of the main teaching

At the end of each lesson, a brief conclusion of what has been taught is provided, which can be used at the end of the class as a closing, and in the next session to remind the students of the topics covered.

Dynamics or activities

Individual or group learning activities or dynamics related to the topic studied are suggested. These can be reproduced for the participants, although it's recommended that each participant have their own book.

Lesson 1. **The old and new man**

Biblical Passage: *Colossians 3:1-2*

Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things.

Objectives:

- **Make** a commitment to God to live worthily according to the Spirit once we've received the grace of salvation.

1.1 Introduction

The Grace of God is wonderful. Without a doubt, the beautiful hymn Amazing Grace reflects the extraordinary way in which God loves us and gives us his grace. His grace seeks us. His grace saves us. But it doesn't end there ... his grace sanctifies us. Then it continues permanently in a way that sustains us and helps us resist sinning. It's also there when we experience the most difficult moments in life, and God surprises us by giving us such an amount of grace that we can endure the difficulty, and even come out stronger.

In Colossians 1:10, Paul exhorts us to *"live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God."* However at times, for various reasons such as enemy attacks, spiritual carelessness, or others, we begin to forget that we're part of the Kingdom of God and that we must live up to its standards.

In this lesson we'll be reminded of how we lived when we didn't have Christ as Savior. But at the same time, we'll also see what the expectations are for each of us now that we're children of God.

1.2 Development

1.2.1 *The nature of the old man (Colossians 3:5-9)*

After showing that deity dwells in Christ, and that therefore he is the only way to the Father, Paul now concentrates in chapter 3 of the letter to the Colossians on the fact that they have already risen in Christ: *set your hearts on things above.* (Col. 3:1)

By doing this, Jesus is asking you to focus on spiritual things rather than carnal things. Paul takes it for granted that they have been born again in Christ. That is why in Col. 3:5 – 17, he makes a contrast between the old life and the new life.

Among other things, he asks them not to tell lies since they have already been born to spiritual life. So Paul makes a list of sins associated with the carnal life such as:

Fornication (in Greek *pornéia*): In the Bible, the term refers to the sexual act outside of marriage. It includes all kinds of illicit sexual relationships, that is, those that take place outside the framework of a valid marriage in the eyes of God. The term "impurity" is a broader term than the previous one as it encompasses various forms of moral perversion.

With respect to fornication, Paul reminds us in 1 Corinthians 5:9-11 - *I wrote to you in my letter not to associate with sexually immoral people— not at all meaning the people of this world who are immoral, or the greedy and swindlers, or idolaters. In that case you would have to leave this world. But now I am writing to you that you must not associate with anyone who claims to be a brother or sister but is sexually immoral or greedy, an idolater or slanderer, a drunkard or swindler. Do not even eat with such people.*

While the world "invites" us to give free rein to our carnal desires, Jesus asks us to keep ourselves from all sin, of which fornication is one with which the world has seduced and made many leave the Way of Life in Christ. So we must always have an alarm system, activated by the Holy Spirit, to alert us to any risk we're incurring. For example, pornography can be the beginning of a path that leads you to fornicate.

Overflowing passions. Today the world openly offers us many things that can provoke overflowing passions in us. Through the internet, TV shows and movies, or even through our cell phones, we can have access to material that awakens these types of passions. Paul encourages young Timothy (2 Tim. 2:22): *Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart.* Paul also warns us that, *"when we were in the realm of the flesh, the sinful passions aroused by the law were at work in us, so that we bore fruit for death"* (Rom. 7: 5). An insane passion can translate into attraction and desire for another person or persons. When it comes to this desire, there can be a lot of impure fantasies, thoughts and ideas that bombard your mind.

The apostle James warns us of all of this in James 1:14b-15: *but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed. Then, after desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it's full-grown, gives birth to death.* So, let's be honest with ourselves and be alert, so that when a desire wants to take control of us, we can avoid it immediately, avoiding the path that leads to death because of sin.

Matthew Henry warns us that tolerating one sin leads to another. Then Paul takes up the list in 3:8 to describe these behaviors of the carnal life: Anger, Rage, Malice, Slander, and Filthy Language.

1.2.2 Called to put on the new man (Col 3:10-11)

Then in Col. 3:10, he describes the way they should walk because of the new way of life to which they have been called. Paul uses the metaphor of dressing to indicate that similarly, we must change our ways as a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. In Gal. 3:27, he also uses the figure to "put on." Paul speaks of being totally renewed in Romans 12:2... *"transform yourselves by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will."*

Paul now proceeds to help them see that in Christ we're all equal: *"where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, barbarian nor Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all, and in all."* Similarly he establishes this in Gal. 3:28. In this way, Paul explains to them, and us, that in God's precious plan of salvation, he makes us all equal, having equal

value. Social or economic divisions should no longer be talked about, nor about whether or not they were originally part of God's people or not. "*Neither Greek nor Jew*" shows us an example in which "Greek" is synonymous with "Gentile." Now the plan of salvation in Christ includes everyone.

With the expression "*circumcision nor uncircumcision*," Paul gives us another way of saying Jew and Gentile. In Jewish tradition, every male had to be circumcised on the eighth day after being born as part of God's covenant with Israel (Lev. 12:3). When he expresses that there is no "*barbarian nor Scythian*" he isn't really using opposites. Both, not being Jews, were referred to as Gentiles.

With the statement "*But Christ is all and is in all*" (v. 11b), Paul once again emphasizes the fullness of the deity of Christ. Even though we have all sinned, we have access to eternal life in Christ when we've been forgiven.

1.2.3 The life of the new man (Col 3:12-17)

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

Paul now goes on to list qualities that should be reflected in the life of the spiritual Christian. If we pay attention, we can see that he is basically describing, although in a different order, the Fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5: 22-23). Note that patience, kindness, humility, love, and peace are to be mentioned. If we seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit, we can be Christlike. All of these are qualities that we need for our interactions with others, highlighting love as the perfect bond. This in turn will be essential to be able to fulfill his mission. Let's analyze what they imply:

Love (*ágape*). This is the love that comes from God. It's not based on receiving something in return, or being attracted by some quality of the other, or on feeling an emotion, or whether or not they deserve it. We love because Christ first loved us. The various qualities of this type of love will be explored in the next chapter. You can only love with this kind of love when you have God in your heart.

Agape describes the love that is from God and that comes from Him whose very nature is love: "*God is love*" (1 John 4:8).

God not only loves, He is love. Everything that God does springs from his love.

Peace (*Shalom* in Hebrew, *eirene* in Greek). It refers to having spiritual prosperity that rests on God. This peace brings serenity to our life. The peace of Christ surpasses the peace that the world offers us. It's not that there are no conflicts, trials, struggles, etc. It's about always being confident that Jesus is with us every day until the end of the world. It certainly requires a constant relationship with Christ. Importantly, we're not exempt from difficulties, but in their midst, we can rest in Jesus (John 16:33). In Romans, Paul teaches us to have peace in the midst of the most difficult circumstances, being convinced that everything that God allows to

come into our lives will be for our good (Rom. 8:28). So we must focus on cultivating peace with God, with oneself and with others.

Patience (makrothumia). This is the ability to forgive our enemies out of love, without holding a grudge for the damage they have done to us. It also alludes to waiting for God's response knowing that his timing is perfect. The patient Christian won't seek vengeance against those who have harmed him. We must try to be as patient as God, who has forgiven us our faults and sins, seeking that we're saved through the sacrifice of Jesus.

Kindness (chrestotes). This is the attitude that helps us respond with good treatment even to those who mistreat us. It includes doing what's right to God and others. It's having a tendency to be personable with others. In Ephesians 4:32, we're called to be kind to one another. To be genuinely kind, you need to be interested in others. This implies knowing their needs, their feelings, their way of thinking, etc. The kind person does not wait for someone to express a need to act. Kindness thinks of doing good in advance

Gentleness (prautes). It's the ability to be humble, especially by submission to God. It means accepting correction without resisting or fighting. So we must always have the attitude of learning from the Word, even in those occasions when we have some false belief, which has been put by the enemy to confuse us.

It's with this virtue that God asks us to help those who go astray and commit sin. *"Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted."* (Gal. 6:1)

Being gentle does not mean being a coward. Gentleness isn't the opposite of leadership. On the contrary, being a Christian leader requires being gentle. Paul tells Timothy that one of the requirements for serving in the church is to be gentle (1 Tim. 6:11). Jesus Himself asks us to be meek and humble of heart like Him (Matthew 11:29). In Titus 3:2, we're asked to be gentle to others.

Self-control (egkrateia). It's the control or self-control over oneself, which makes one disciplined and gives him the conviction of not giving in to temptation ... to be able to rule his own spirit. In Proverbs 25:28 we're told that *"Like a city whose walls are broken through is a person who lacks self-control."* Self-control also implies being a disciplined person to achieve what you set out to do. A simple example is that if I want to have a better relationship with Christ and need to get up earlier to spend time with Him to do so, I must be disciplined enough to do just that.

Forgiving one another is also highlighted. As Christ forgave us, so we're required to do the same. Correctly assessing the way Jesus forgave us will always make us more generous with forgiveness, and never less generous.

1.3 Conclusions

The enemy has multiplied the ways of causing us to stumble. However, the decision is up to each of us. We can hear the sweet invitation of Jesus every day: Matt. 7:13-14: *“Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it. But small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it.”*

Let’s not take lightly the exhortation to walk worthy of Christ. The crown of life is ahead. Let’s take care of the very valuable salvation that has been given to us by grace, through the sacrifice of Jesus and his subsequent resurrection.

Don’t forget that our decisions will affect not only our lives personally, but also of our family, friends, loved ones and all those who are in our area of influence. Jesus goes with us on this Journey of Grace, and Christians must encourage each other along the journey.

My commitment to God.

Application exercises

1. What thoughts, attitudes and actions must you eradicate from your life, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to walk worthy of the one who called us, Christ Jesus?

2. Is there an area of your life that you have struggled with for a long time and have not been able to overcome it? I encourage you to approach the pastor or a more spiritually mature brother for advice.

3. Share among the group what have been the ways that have worked best for you to be alert against the bad desires that can lead us to sin, and with it to death.

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Lesson 2. **Christians who don't live victoriously - How is this possible?**

Biblical Passage: **Hebrews 2:1-3**

We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. For since the message spoken through angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment, how shall we escape if we ignore so great a salvation? This salvation, which was first announced by the Lord, was confirmed to us by those who heard him.

Objectives:

- **Evaluate** the spiritual state in which we find ourselves and make the necessary decisions to live a victorious life in Christ.

2.1 Introduction

God's promises are wonderful. Many of them are fulfilled day by day in our life. However, sometimes it seems that these promises don't reach our lives or sometimes we feel a distance between God and ourselves.

Sometimes what's happening in our life is that we've been saved by the grace of God through Christ. We have even been sanctified by that grace. But there came a point where we neglected and began to live, not according to the Spirit, but according to the flesh.

This has then caused that distancing from God. But someone may ask, is it possible that we can sin even after being sanctified? If this is possible, what can we then do to always be in communion with God? We'll talk about this in our lesson today.

2.2 Development

2.2.1 Christians who don't live victoriously - How is this possible?

The apostle Paul had to face sinful situations within some churches, as happened with the church in Corinth. But then a central question arises:

Can a Christian who is saved but not yet sanctified live a victorious life?

Some passages refer to people who had already accepted Christ and were being dominated by sin:

- 1 Cor. 3:1-4,
- 1 Cor. 5:1-12,
- 1 Cor. 6:1-11.

The writer of Hebrews tells us in 5:12, *they ought to be teachers...* and then in 2 Peter 2:2, he says that by only being saved, we're like the dog that returns to its vomit when we sin again. Hence the urgency to seek sanctifying grace. By not being sanctified, we don't have perfect love.

We might ask ourselves, what about Christians today? Richard Taylor mentions some characteristics of people who don't have a life of holiness:

"We have all struggled with integrity, trying to fulfill our intentions. Most of us have promised that our spiritual lives will be victorious, that we'll have regular devotions. We'll care for the needs of others; we'll do whatever it takes to improve our married life; we'll listen more carefully to our children; we'll testify of Christ to our neighbor, all with the best of intentions. However, we have failed in part or in whole. If we're sincere, we know how impossible it's to accomplish all this without God's help." David Kendall and Everett Leadingham (2002: 27)

- They don't grow in grace. They keep stumbling over the same thing for years.
 - They don't have a firm purpose to follow God at all costs.
 - They lose their spiritual momentum by falling into spiritual lethargy.
 - They get carried away by the material
- They are motivated by selfish interests
 - They lack a humble and forgiving spirit.
 - They aren't deeply spiritual.
 - They don't have, or carry through on, concern for the unsaved.

2.2.2 Explanation of this life of the defeated and apathetic Christian - The carnal mind.

If we interview some of the Christians who aren't living a victorious life, we may hear some answers trying to explain their non-victorious life. The reality is that we look for pretexts to justify our failures, arguing things such as:

- We're new to the Gospel. We don't have a lot of experience in the Christian life.
- We have these failures because of our natural temperaments ...
- It's because of my physical condition: fatigue, stress, etc.

Sin in the life of the Christian has three terrible results:

- It brings dishonor to the name of the Lord Jesus, whom we represent.
- It steals your joy and your power. When you give in to sin, God won't use you.
- It destroys your Christian testimony.

We can say that they are living a fight against the flesh and are generally defeated. The Apostle Paul describes this situation in Romans 7. In particular in Romans 7:24, he sees himself as a miserable being because he could not overcome what he calls the "law of sin."

This is something we must explain to prevent Christians from remaining in this state of carnality. In the human being, there is a propensity toward evil inherited in the moral nature of the person that regeneration alone (carried out by God's saving grace) won't remedy. Paul tells us about the carnal mind in Rom. 8: 5-7, *"Those who live according to the flesh have their*

minds set on what the flesh desires.” Rom. 7:14 says, “I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin.”

When Paul says: *"For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out"* (Romans 7.18), he is referring to the inability to be able to love and obey God with all one's heart by our own strength. Each one of us are slaves of "I" who always wants to get his way. (Busic, 2020, 83). We see this also in Mark 7:21-22, which teaches us that in the heart there is a tendency toward evil. Therefore, we need a second work of grace, which is sanctification.

2.2.3 The grace of Christ through the Holy Spirit in all stages of our life.

We have seen that there is a propensity towards evil which characterizes the human race. Man discovers it inside himself, that is, he does not generate it. It also tells us that living by the flesh, on our own power, leads us to death. Scripture points to inner depravity as the source of evils.

But why does this happen if the person has already accepted Christ in their heart by faith?

Well, it's very important to make it clear that as children of God, we constantly need God's grace. Let's see how this is carried out in the life of the believer.

2.2.4 Preventive Grace

Paul recognizes the state of people without Christ. As fallen human beings, we're *"dead in our transgressions and sins"* (Ephesians 2:1). We're unable to come to God through our own strength. Therefore, God, as always, takes the initiative and seeks us through his preventive grace.

Preventive grace is poured out upon us even before we've recognized Christ as Savior. That preventive grace is already acting in our lives in such a way that when someone shares the Gospel with us, or some experience occurs, we can recognize in a personal way that Christ is the means given to us for the forgiveness of our sins. This leads us to a repentance of the sinful life we've lived. Paul declares that we were *"dead in your transgressions and sins"* (Ephesians 2:1-5).

2.2.5 Saving Grace

The apostle Paul declares to us in Romans:

"For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," (3:23).

When we repent of our sins, motivated by the Holy Spirit, we recognize the redemptive sacrifice of Christ Jesus and his resurrection from the dead. Then, by faith in Christ, we recognize him as our Lord and personal Savior.

Paul shows us how the grace of God is so great: *"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us."* (Romans 5.8)

Paul himself experienced that saving grace on his way to Damascus. He was not looking for God, but God was looking for him, as he does with each one of us, initiating by his prevenient grace and saving grace. (Acts 9:1-19)

N.T. Wright refers to God's great love like this: *"In all the New Testament, Jesus' death is seen as an act of love, both the love of Jesus (Galatians 2.20) as well as the love of God who sent him and whose bodily expression is in Christ himself"* (John 3.16, 13.1, Romans 5.6-11, 8.31-39; 1 John 4.9-10)

Paul reminds us that we're saved by grace (Ephesians 2:8-10; Romans 6:23). He then declares: *"being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* (Philippians 1.6)

This is in agreement with what Jesus declared in John 14:6: *"I am the way, the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."*

It's important to point out that Jesus has left us his Holy Spirit as his representative. The Holy Spirit is responsible for revealing Jesus to us. It's through the Holy Spirit that the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ operates in us (John 16:13-15). David Busic (2021: 18) declares:

In Jesus, we find the way to the Father; He is the way home. In Jesus, we find the truth. He embodies the immutable, accurate and firm truth of the character and nature of the Father. In Jesus, we find life, the abundant life, both now and in the new creation that God promised that would come. This is the Journey of Grace.

David Busic himself (2021; 26) describes how Paul saw this. Through the experience of an intimate encounter with Christ, Paul discovered a righteousness that was not his own. Paul believed that the relationship of the believer with Christ (the person) could become so intimate that he refers to this as *"unity in Christ"*, which indicates a total union (1 Corinthians 15:1-8).

Now, Paul has explained that the law of sin is to live by the flesh, which leads to the path of death. But the Christian cannot always do what he wants to do. Paul himself declares this in Galatians 5:17 *"For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want."*

Paul knows that the regenerated Christian is still a person dominated by rebellion. Pride and disbelief go hand in hand in the old man. What will we do to remedy this? What is God's provision for us?

2.2.6 Sanctifying Grace

Once we've been saved by faith, Paul urges us to look for the fullness of the Holy Spirit so that this tendency to evil is eradicated. We see: *"Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship."* (Romans 12:1)

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
(Galatians 2:20)

If we seek the fullness of the Holy Spirit, we can be like Christ. We need it for our interactions with others, highlighting love as the perfect bond. This is only possible after accepting Christ as Savior. His sacrifice is enough; He has brought us from death to life.

Victorious life is a life of peace and joy in the Lord. It’s a life of constant communion with the Lord. It’s a life of victory over sin. As a warning we must say that if we neglect our spiritual life, we can return to the life of sin.

This victorious life in Christ demands fidelity, obedience, prayer, and discipline among other things. But the essential thing is to ask for the fullness of the Holy Spirit and take care of our relationship with God every day

2.3 Conclusions

Jesus’ sacrifice and resurrection brings life to those who were in sin. His saving grace is for anyone who accepts it (John 3:16). But once we’re part of the children of God through salvation in Christ, we’re urged to live in holiness.

Thank God that Jesus knows us very well. Before returning to the right hand of the Father, he left us a counselor, who is the Holy Spirit. Through him, who is the third person of the Triune God, we can receive the cleansing of our heart that tends to be dominated by the flesh.

So, if God asks us to live by a certain standard, he also gives us the means to achieve it. Our responsibility is to ask for this heart cleansing, and once we’ve obtained it, we must take care to maintain an intimate relationship with God day by day.

My commitment to God:

Application exercises

Make a sincere analysis and recognize what spiritual state you find yourself in. Are you still not saved? Have you still not been sanctified yet? Have you been sanctified, but have neglected your spiritual life? What are you going to do to have a victorious life in Christ?

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Lesson 3. **How is your soul?**

Biblical Passage: **James 5:16**

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

Objective:

- **Take on** the responsibility of being accountable in the various areas of your life.

3.1 Introduction

In our context, it's common to greet each other asking, "How are you?" I usually also ask about their family. This shows our interest in other people. But, if we really want to be a blessing to others, we could change the question to "How are you doing with your soul?" Undoubtedly, it's a much deeper question, and avoids the classic courtesy responses that we usually hear such as "Good, thanks to God" or "It's hard, but I'm making it," and so on.

But if we've decided to follow Christ, we must always look for fellow travelers to ask questions similar to "How is your soul?" David Busic (2021) in his book *Way, Truth and Life*, describes for us this wonderful blessing of being part of the Kingdom of God as a Journey of Grace. He means that at all times, Christ goes with us and will give us the necessary help to continue believing or even to lift us up if we've fallen.

All Christians go on this Journey of Grace (which is Christ). Therefore, we have a responsibility to each other to be mutually supportive. Our Lord Jesus had a group of twelve disciples, but even within the group, he had a more intimate group with whom he shared his most difficult moments.

If our Lord Jesus did this, don't you think that you and I should think about having an intimate group of people for mutual help? We should think of at least one friend with whom to discuss our trials and struggles to receive words of advice and encouragement.

What should that person be like to help hold you accountable for your spiritual life? How can we have that mutual accountability? What advantages does this offer us? What should I do if a problem occurs that is beyond our capabilities? This is what we'll learn in today's lesson.

3.2 Development

3.2.1 **John Wesley and small groups**

One of the distinguishing characteristics of Christianity is that it's lived in society. We're called to be relational beings, to be salt and light. One of the great advantages is that through my relationships with others, I can strengthen my spiritual life. And I can also receive help if I am failing in my faith or if I am at risk of falling into sin.

John Wesley (1703-1791) understood this well, and he worked with small groups that he called classes. Those were the best places to strengthen each other and contributed greatly to the revival that God brought in those days. G. D. Romero (2010) mentions that the small groups were a great blessing

in their search for holiness of heart and life, through their spiritual communion in prayer, meditation and reading the Scriptures, singing hymns, mutual confession of sins, sharing experiences (positive and negative), testimonies and spiritual counseling.” (par. 3)

So we encourage all men to participate in small groups. If you already do, I suggest including accountability as an essential part of your small group practices. If there are no small groups in your church yet, we suggest you pray and fast about the possibility of having small groups. Talk to other men about this and then talk with your pastor so that these groups can be established.

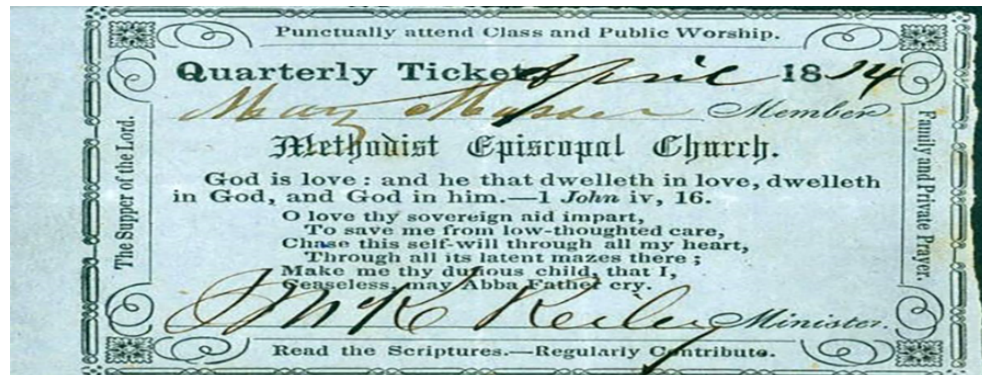
G. Romero (2010), when analyzing the ministry of small groups with John Wesley, found that:

Above all, they were a means of grace by which the social religion that Wesley taught was concretized. Responding to the grace of God in Christ and through the action of the Holy Spirit, Methodists in class meetings held each other accountable, under the spiritual supervision of a leader, to carry out works of mercy and piety.

3.2.2 How to choose a discipler or spiritual journey companion

In particular, this lesson is more focused on us looking for a person with whom we can be accountable. Thus, we'll now give some practical advice so that we can choose the right person(s) for this purpose.

- Must be a Christian, preferably from your church.
- They must commit to having time to carry out this accountability meeting once a week (or whatever schedule is best for you).
- They must be available for each other on any day of the week, if any kind of help is required that cannot wait until the day of your meeting.
- Even in the midst of these times of pandemic and other difficulties, your meetings shouldn't be suspended. Get creative and look to use options like phone chats, video calls, Zoom meetings, or whatever else that is within your reach.
- There must be a mutual commitment not to disclose what's mentioned in the meeting.
- Choose someone of the same gender to avoid future temptations. (Eph. 4:27)



Source: The Methodist Question: How did John Wesley empower the laity?

3.2.3 *How can I be successful in holding myself and others accountable?*

John Wesley was the founder of the Methodist movement (from where the Church of the Nazarene originated). He had a series of questions prepared for the members of his small groups. Without a doubt, they can be of great help for our “spiritual audit”. Among the questions, the following stand out (Shogren, n.d.: para. 8):

1. What known sins have you committed since our last meeting?
2. What temptations have you faced?
3. Were you able to successful resist them? If so, how?
4. Have you thought, said or done anything that has caused you to think that you have sinned?
5. Do you have a secret that you want to keep for yourself?

Joseph Yoo (2016) suggests that every day we prepare ourselves to be accountable, not only to our selected companion on the Journey of Grace, but also to be accountable to God:

- What things am I participating in that bring my soul closer to God?
- What are the things that I am doing that are putting a gap between me and God?
- What are the things that I am doing in my life that really make my soul shine and flourish?
- What things am I involved in that are draining the life from my soul?

Then, based on the answers we give, we must change that which takes us away from God. Sometimes it will be very clear. For example, if I am cheating my customers with the price of the products I sell, the Holy Spirit will help me understand that I am committing sin.

But there will also be things that in the first instance seem harmless to us. Given this, I recommend you meditate on the following phrase by Susana Wesley, mother of J. Wesley:

"Anything that weakens your reason, undermines the delicacy of your conscience, dulls your sensitivity to God, or takes away your delight in the spiritual, or anything that elevates the supremacy of the body over your mind, is sin for you." S. Wesley

I share an example of this to make it clearer to you. If I spend many hours watching television, is it a sin for me or not? What do you think? When would it be?

Joseph Yoo (2016, para. 13) invites us to reflect day by day on the following question "Am I confusing routine with commitment?" This is because we're sometimes involved in various ministries, but we may be reducing our devotional time with God.

3.2.4 What should we do if the problem is bigger than we can handle, and we don't have the resources to give or receive help?

It's quite possible that in this exercise of accountability, we'll come across difficulties that are beyond our abilities to be of help to one another. For example, if we're faced with something that requires more in-depth professional counseling, we may need to seek the support of the pastor or an expert Christian counselor on the problem.

3.3 Conclusions

During the Wesleyan revival, class meetings grew in importance, becoming the primary means of growth in the pursuit of holiness of heart and life. God certainly blessed this strategy carried out by John Wesley. It's time to pick up and go back to what God can use for our growth. Pray that in our local church, we'll have such types of groups.

We have reviewed the importance and benefits of being accountable to others, but also the dangers of not doing so. We must recognize that if we want to continue growing in the grace of God, we must have fellow travelers with whom we can strengthen and be strengthened.

Within these "companions of the Journey in Grace", we particularly must have at least one with whom we can exercise mutual accountability. Let's ask God for wisdom and pray for the Holy Spirit to help us choose that intimate partner. But at the same time, let's also pray to become the instrument of blessing to edify the lives of many others.

We have one question left to meditate on every day. How is my soul? Meditating on it and taking the necessary actions will increase the possibility of remaining faithful on the Journey of Grace, until we achieve the crown of life.

My commitment to God:

Application exercises

1. Write down everything you do during each hour of the day throughout a week. What could you cut or reduce to make better use of your time?

2. Spiritual Accountability for Men - Samuel Clark has adapted the questions as follows. Please participate with one of your travelling companions in The Journey of Grace right now and answer each of these questions.
 - a. Have you missed the biblical standards for integrity this week in your work or ministry?
 - b. Have you been with a woman other than your wife this week in a situation that could be construed as suspicious?
 - c. Have you been exposed to any pornographic or sexually impure material? Are you winning the battle of the eyes?
 - d. Have you spent adequate time in prayer and Bible study?
 - e. Have you managed your time effectively?
 - f. Have you taken enough time to rest?
 - g. Have you lied to me in any of your answers?

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Lesson 4. **Self-care**

Biblical Passage: **1 Corinthians 6:19-20**

Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Objectives:

- **Start**, or improve if you have already started, a balanced lifestyle that allows you to enjoy health in all areas as a person, and become aware of self-care.

4.1 Introduction

At the time of writing this lesson, we're still in the middle of the pandemic. This has upset our routines, and there has also been a lot of heavy stress experienced by many people due to the fear of contagion, or loss of employment, or because relationships with others have become more difficult. We cannot deny the great impact of not being able to go out for coffee with friends, go to the park with family, or regularly attend a church service.

Even children are suffering havoc. They must take classes electronically or can't go to school at all; they have no one to talk with about their doubts; they miss socializing with their peers, etc. Mothers of families have had to multiply their work like never before to make time for many things in addition to their already heavy load of daily tasks, including helping their children with classes, making products to sell, etc.

But what does the Bible tell us about self-care? Are there biblical principles we could use to have an ongoing self-care plan? What areas of our life do they cover? This is what our lesson for today is about.

4.2 Development

4.2.1 What is self-care?

On one occasion a scribe asked Jesus to tell him which of all the commandments was the most important. To which Jesus replied:

"The most important one," answered Jesus, "is this: 'Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. 'The second is this: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these." (Mark 12:29-31)

Notice that after loving God, the second part of the commandment is to love other people as yourself. Yes, we read that right. The Bible says that we should love ourselves too. This certainly implies self-care. Do you agree with me?

Let's look at an example. When they were little, my daughters used to get sick and my wife and I would quickly get them to a doctor. Why did we do that? The answer is obvious, because

we love them. In the same way, we tried to ensure that they had what was necessary for a healthy development. So if caring for others is out of love, we should realize that if we love ourselves, we should care for ourselves.

4.2.2 Spiritual health care

Suppose you need to take a trip with your family. Would you dare drive for a whole night with physical fatigue after several days of not sleeping? The most logical answer is no. Nobody wants to risk their life, that of their family or that of others. Now let's change the question, would you dare take your family on the spiritual journey we're on towards the heavenly goal if you were in poor spiritual health?

Our spiritual health is a priority for every believer in Christ. Paul put it like this:

Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to preaching and to teaching. Do not neglect your gift, which was given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you. Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers. (1 Tim. 4: 13-16)

Would you dare drive for a whole night with physical fatigue after several days of not sleeping? The answer is no. Nobody wants to risk their life, that of their family or that of others. Now let's change the question, would you dare take your family on the spiritual journey we're on, towards the heavenly goal, if you had poor spiritual health? Ángel Rodríguez Gómez.

Even in such difficult times, such as this long pandemic season, where the amount of work has increased for everyone, we cannot permit the sacrificing of our devotional time to God.

- Meet regularly with a mentor whom you can talk to about how you're doing and feeling.
- Practice your spiritual disciplines on a daily basis. That includes prayer, fasting, study and meditation on the Word, etc.

4.2.3 Emotional health care

Managing emotions were rarely discussed in church leadership. But we serve a God who designed us with emotions. Therefore, it's also meant that we show our emotions. We thank God that attention from a Christian perspective is being given to this issue today.

Emotional well-being is focused, above all, on managing both positive and negative emotions. It's important to understand our own emotions, handle them maturely, and be sensitive to the emotions of others.

- Recognize your limitations. You can't do everything. Don't overload yourself with worries.
- Practice forgiveness towards yourself and towards others.

- Meet regularly with a mentor with whom you can talk about your conflicting or repressed emotions.
- Have a good balance between spending time with your family and work or study is important for a couple, and each one must be aware of promoting the integral well-being of their spouse.

4.2.4 Physical health care

Paul writes in Ephesians 5:29:

After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body,

Being physically fit to carry out our work is of great relevance. A healthy body helps us have a clear mind when making decisions. The way we treat our bodies is also an example to others and an illustration of our respect and appreciation for what God has given us to do.

An example that clearly illustrates the aforementioned is seen in 1 Kings 18 and 19. Chapter 18 tells us how God destroyed the 450 prophets of Baal through the prophet Elijah. This happened after a divine manifestation in which God lit on fire the offering that Elijah had offered to Him. This isn't like what happened with the prophets of Baal, who got tired of crying out to their idol when nothing happened.

When wicked king Ahab told this to his wife Jezebel, she went into a rage and promised that she was going to kill Elijah as revenge for the death of the prophets of Baal. After the great demonstration of God's support for his life, one would think that facing a woman, even if she was the king's wife, would not present him with any great difficulty. But something strange happened. Elijah panicked and fled to hide.

So God sought Elijah to confront him. Elijah practically asked him to let him die. Can you imagine how Elijah's emotional state was at that moment? God's answer was simple. He gave him time to rest in the cave and he fed him. After that, Elijah was ready to obey God.

We shouldn't pretend that our needs are only spiritual. We must become aware of this physical aspect. Therefore, we must not evade the responsibility of working on healthy habits such as:

- Try to sleep the hours recommended for your age. If you have trouble sleeping, not only is it healthy to pray and ask God for help, but you may also need to seek a specialist to see what the problem is that causes this sleep disorder.
- Take a weekly rest day.
- Take advantage of vacations at work or school to rest. Even if you're in a ministry like the pastorate, you cannot do without your downtime. You must teach the church to respect your time off and that of your family.
- Seek the advice of a health expert in selecting what you eat.
- Seek to get some exercise. It's also a time that you can spend with your family.
- Take care of the symptoms that your body sends you to warn you of a health problem.

4.2.5 Mental health care

The US Library of Medicine defines mental health as a state of emotional, psychological, and social well-being.

According to the World Health Organization (2018):

Mental health is a state of well-being in which the person realizes his capacities and is able to cope with the normal stresses of life, to work productively and to contribute to his community.

Mental health is the foundation of individual well-being and effective community functioning. Mental health can help you:

- Cope with the stresses of life
- Be physically healthy
- Have healthy relationships
- Make a significant contribution to your community
- Work productively
- Reach your full potential

Mental disorders can increase your risk for physical health problems, such as stroke, type 2 diabetes, and heart disease.

What can affect your mental health? There are many different factors that can affect your mental health, including (WHO, 2018):

- Persistent socioeconomic pressures are a well-known risk to people's mental health
- Rapid social changes.
- The risks of violence.
- Poor physical health.
- Human rights violations.
- Stressful working conditions.
- Specific personality and psychological factors that make a person more vulnerable to mental disorders.
- Genetic factors or brain biochemical imbalances.
- Life experiences, such as trauma or abuse.
- Family history of mental health problems.
- Your lifestyle, such as diet, physical activity, and substance use.

To strengthen our mental health, the WHO (2018) mentions that we should:

- Attend to the health and nutrition needs of the child.
- Support children, such as capacity building programs and Child and Youth Development programs.
- Promote the socioeconomic emancipation of women, for example, improving access to education and granting microcredits.
- Provide mental health programs at work. For example, stress prevention programs.
- Have violence prevention programs

Learn to manage stress. We can add that we must be aware of the internal and external factors that perpetuate the high level of stress. Sometimes we have many doubts about the well-being of others. Will they have what they need to eat? Will they all be okay? This adds to worries about everyday problems at work. To this, add the problems of the family. So, we have the perfect formula for the enemy to start attacking us in our mind.

We must pay attention to what Paul says,

Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. (Phil. 4:6)

If your anxiety or stress persists, don't hesitate to ask your pastor or a counselor, preferably Christian, for help.

According to the American Heart Association (2014), to reduce stress, it's recommended:

- Encouraging positive intrapersonal conversation can help you calm down and manage stress. For example, instead of saying "I can't do this", you should increase your faith and express "I will do my best. I believe that God will help me".
- Divide big problems into smaller problems. Go step by step, rather than trying to do everything at once.
- Temporarily get away from the problem situation and try to resolve it once things have settled down.
- Practice some artistic activity, such as drawing, painting, etc.
- Make a scrapbook or photo album that allows you to focus on good memories.
- Read a book, a short story or a magazine.
- Find time to go out with your family and friends.
- Exercise or play a sport.
- Take a walk and contemplate nature.
- Meditate.
- Listen to music.
- Find a hobby.
- Play with your children or pets, outdoors if possible.
- Garden or undertake a home improvement project.
- Take a bike ride

The forced confinement of people at home with the consequent cessation of all "non-essential" social or economic activity is a new phenomenon in the lives of most of the populations that have suffered it. It is having and will have repercussions in various areas of our lives, which make the uncertainty due to this pandemic even greater.

4.3 Conclusions

If we lose focus on the purpose of our life, the worries, problems and situations of each day can undermine our health in the various areas of our life such as spiritual, physical, social, emotional and mental. We have seen that the alteration in any of them affects the other health

areas of our life. This will bring multiple problems to our life such as poor performance in our daily activities, work, ministry or studies.

It can also cause serious health problems which can even lead to death. To this must be added the costs of all this. This is why we've seen the necessity to care for various aspects of our lives.

The spiritual aspect of our lives is certainly important to cultivate. In fact, it's certainly the most important. Let's be careful not to lead our life, that of our family and that of others without first enjoying a state of spiritual health.

My commitment to God:

Application exercises

Which of the following signs of problems with your mental health have you detected in your own life? When it comes to your emotions, it can be difficult to know what's normal and what's not. But mental health problems have warning signs, such as:

Possible symptoms of mental health problems	I have not noticed the symptom	I have noticed this symptom a little	I have clearly noticed this symptom
1. Changes in your eating or sleeping habits			
2. Isolating yourself from people and activities you enjoy.			
3. Having no or little energy			
4. Feeling empty or as if nothing matters			
5. Having unexplained aches and pains			
6. Feeling helpless or hopeless			
7. Feeling unusually confused, forgetful, angry, upset, worried, or scared			
8. Having severe mood swings that cause problems in your relationships			
9. Having thoughts and memories that you can't get out of your head			
10. Hearing voices or believing things that aren't true			
11. Thinking about hurting yourself or others			
12. Not being able to do daily tasks like taking care of your children or going to work or school			

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Lesson 5. **My home, a place for the devil or the Holy Spirit?**

Biblical Passage: **John 3:20**

Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.

Objectives:

- **Assess** the way you're behaving in relation to giving place to the Holy Spirit. If not, determine the actions necessary for this to occur in my person and in my home.

5.1 Introduction

Many of us like to admire nature and the creatures that God has created. For example, I like to see birds in my garden. Someone commented that if one wants to attract birds to come to the garden, we must create the right environment. Thus, some people put out something for them to drink, they put food within their reach, and set up the garden a bit, including a little house for them. Over time, the birds will gain confidence and we'll see them come more often.

In leadership, there is the so-called Law of Attraction. John Maxwell, an expert on the subject, tells us that you'll attract people similar to yourself. That's good when what they see are good things. But it also works in the opposite direction, that is, if we have bad behavior, we'll attract people with bad behaviors similar to ours.

The same is true in the spiritual area. We can welcome the presence of the Holy Spirit in our home, at work, in the Church, etc. But the Bible also teaches us that we can grieve and drive out the Holy Spirit and make room for the Devil. When can this happen? What would the consequences be? What can we do to avoid giving way to the Devil? We'll learn about this and more in this lesson.

5.2 Development

5.2.1 We can give way to the devil when we lie.

Have you ever lied? Think about it before you increase the count of lies that you have told.

Today it's very common to lie. Sometimes we tend to think that only certain types of people lie frequently. We think of bad politicians who use lies to obtain positions that give them personal benefits. However, you can lie at work, at school, with friends, with family, and even at church.

Proverbs 19:5 says, *"A false witness will not go unpunished, and whoever pours out lies will not go free."* Let's be very careful not to bear false testimony against others. If we've done so, it's time to go and ask for forgiveness and try to repay the damage that we've done to others.

Have you ever been tempted to:

- Falsify a Church report?
- Lie to your spouse about where and with whom you have been?

- Lie about your progress in a job that you've been asked to do?
- Lie to your children about taking them somewhere for a walk later?

Sometimes, those who lie do so with the intent to harm, others to get out of a bad situation. Sometimes we say that we're "piously" lying. In either case, whether the lie is white, pious or small, etc., it's a lie. Therefore, it's sin.

Since the Bible warns us in various passages that it's sin, we should pay more attention to it.

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—they will be consigned to the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death (Rev. 21:8)

Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood. (Rev. 22:15)

Let's analyze some consequences of lying

1. Lying leads to eternal death.
2. Satan, the father of all lies, induces man to lie, to drag him to do worse things.
3. He who practices sin is of the devil, because the devil has sinned from the beginning. (John 3:8)
4. The liar loses credibility in his surroundings; he's no longer believed in what he says and does.
5. One lie leads to a bigger lie, and that leads to another, taking family, friends, church with it.

5.2.2 We can give way to the devil when we get angry and sin.

The rhythm of life leads us to live in a hurry. This accumulates a certain stress that, sometimes by not knowing how to channel it, keeps us in a very irritable state of mind. By doing so, we're likely to end up offending others.

We must remember that anger and wrath are the fruit of the flesh, that they lead us to death since they are sin. In the list in Galatians 5:19-21, anger and rage are placed on the same level as adultery and murder. All the things that are mentioned there are evidence of the control of the flesh, and anger is no exception.

In the Biblical Arguments Blog, anger is defined as: A strong disgust produced from within, encouraged by external factors but conceived in our sinful nature.

To illustrate this concept, let's look at 1 Samuel 25 for a story of what can happen if we allow ourselves to be dominated by anger. This passage describes a problem David had when he needed food for his people. He sent some of his men to solicit the support of Nabal, who was insolent and misbehaving.

Nabal was a wealthy man who had received the protection of David's men. But he refused to help them. Furthermore, he treated them very badly. He even ignored David (*"And who is this David?"*). So when the men gave the report to David, he was very enraged and asked his men to get ready to go and attack Nabal and his people.

On the contrary, Abigail, Nabal's wife was a beautiful and intelligent woman. Upon arriving at the house, she learned about what had happened from one of her servants, who told her *"Think carefully about what you should do, because ruin is about to fall on our master and on his entire family. He has such a bad temper that you can't even talk to him"*. Have you ever met someone with such a reputation?

A life lived in anger is a life focused on "me" and not on Christ. Therefore, every time we allow ourselves to be controlled by anger, we're sinning against God and showing that our old man is the one that predominates in us instead of the Holy Spirit of God. Biblical Arguments Blog

So Abigail went to apologize for the affront to David and his men. She also recognized David as King and brought them food. By then, David was already on his way to Nabal's house with 400 of his men. David said, *"May God punish me mercilessly if before dawn I don't finish off all his men!"*

It happened that Abigail with her servants and David with his men met on the road. Then Abigail fell down before David. She said, *"Ignore that rude Nabal, because he lives up to his name, which means" fool." Foolishness accompanies him everywhere. I, for my part, didn't see the messengers that you, my lord, sent."* She also told him to avoid shedding innocent blood, and she recognized him as God's anointed king, even though Saul still clung to the throne.

What lessons can we learn together from this passage?

- Nabal was a man with a very bad temper, that is to say, he got angry and mistreated everyone equally. That is a sin.
- This behavior led him to treat David badly, who, although he was not yet king, the people knew that he was the new king already anointed by God.
- Anger at Nabal's mistreatment ignited David's anger. This means that it set off a chain reaction.
- David, being enraged, was willing to not only destroy Nabal, but also his family and his servants and families. We see that anger can lead us not only to self-destruction, but also to the destruction of our loved ones and those around us.

In the Got Questions Blog (2021), options are suggested to us about how to handle anger biblically. There are basic rules of communication that are shared with us in Ephesians 4:15, 25-32.

- Be honest and speak assertively (Ephesians 4: 15,25). People cannot read our minds; tell the truth in love.

- Be timely (Eph. 4: 26-27). We must not allow what's bothering us to grow out of control. It's important to handle and share what bothers us before it gets to that point. Develop the ability to express your ideas, emotions, and feelings appropriately.
- Attack the problem, not the person (Ephesians 4:29, 31), with words that are for edification.
- Act, don't react (Eph. 4: 31-32). Because of our fallen nature, our first impulse is usually a sinful one. The time used to "count to ten" should be used to reflect on the kind way to respond, and to remind ourselves how anger should be used to solve problems and not to create bigger ones.
- Act to solve our part of the problem (Rom. 12:18). We cannot control how others act or respond, but we can make the necessary changes to do so on our part.

5.2.3 We can give way to the devil when we steal, or by speaking obscene words.

Many people are business people. Having a difficult economic situation, they're tempted to cheat people by incorrectly weighing the merchandise they sell.

A fool finds pleasure in wicked schemes, but a person of understanding delights in wisdom. (Prov. 10:23)

We must be careful not to rob God. This could happen if we don't give our tithes and offerings.

Will a mere mortal rob God? Yet you rob me. "But you ask, 'How are we robbing you?' "In tithes and offerings." (Mal. 3:80)

We can give way to the devil when we speak obscene words or do obscene things.

Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. (1 Cor. 6:9-10)

In general we can say that we give place to the devil if we are doing the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21)

5.2.4 How to avoid giving a place to the devil

Renew yourself in the spirit of your mind. That is, put on the new man who has been created in the likeness of God in righteousness and holiness of truth.

Let's proceed to do the works of the spirit. In Ephesians 2:10 we're reminded that *"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."*

Let's seek with the help of the Holy Spirit to develop the Fruit of the Spirit. With this we'll avoid saddening the Holy Spirit of God.

By removing the works of the flesh, you can, together with your loved ones, enjoy all the promises that God has for you and yours.

- You'll be able to worship freely
- Your prayers will be unimpeded.
- You'll avoid many unnecessary problems
- You'll enjoy better health
- You'll enjoy the peace that Jesus gives us through his Holy Spirit.
- Your family, work, and social relationships will be more productive and attractive.
- Your performance in different areas (as a husband, as a father, as a Christian brother, as a worker, etc.) will improve accordingly.
- Your testimony will be better and you'll be able to share with others.
- Your ministry will be blessed and used by God in a great way.



5.3 Conclusions

It's incredible that sometimes, unconsciously, we ourselves have invited the enemy to dwell in our home. We've seen that by doing what is sinful, we give ground to the enemy to the point of leaving our life and that of our family under his rule.

But on the contrary, every time we ask the Holy Spirit to help us do every good work for which we were created, we cause God to draw near to us (James 4: 8).

So it's urgent that as a family we review everything we do to see if it's sin in light of the Bible. For example, what kind of TV shows and movies do we watch at home, what examples of behavior are we giving our children, how do I act towards each one of them, etc.

Then we must proceed, with the help of God, to eradicate in the name of Christ everything that is separating us from God.

My commitment to God:

Application exercises

1. Write down everything that is giving a place to the devil in your life and in your home.

2. What are you willing to do, with God's help, for God to take control of your life and home?

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Lesson 6. **How to be a better father**

Biblical Passage: *1 Timothy 3:4*

He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect.

Objective:

- **Evaluate** our role as fathers and determine to implement, with the help of God, the changes necessary to form children in Christ's likeness.

6.1 Introduction

We've heard the expression "Where did I go wrong?" regarding the training of our children. It's correct to recognize that the task of parenting is extremely complex. But at the same time, we must recognize that God gives us wise instructions in his Word to form them in the right way.

In this lesson, we're going to learn some biblical principles that will help us build the character of our children. For this we must bear in mind that the purpose of the Christian is to have a character like Christ.

6.2 Development

6.2.1 Let's be more loving and give evidence of it. (1 John 4:16).

John learned the love of Christ and then of the Holy Spirit. Then he wrote: "... *God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them.*"

Therefore, we must bear in mind the importance of loving our neighbor, and the best way to do that is by starting at home. Be careful to love your children. Also love your wife in such a way that your children notice it and aspire to have a home like yours.

We must show affection for each child and for our wife with acts and gifts that show how you feel about them. Keep all the promises you make to your children. That's another way to show that you love them. Human nature cannot produce this kind of love or kindness. It's the fruit of the Spirit, not the work of the flesh (Gal. 5:15-24).

6.2.2 Let's be nice to everyone

In the previous lesson, we studied how anger leads us to be upset about everything and everyone. But we also saw some tips on how to let go of that constant state of anger or that kind of anger that causes us to sin.

The Word teaches us that Christ died for us so we could have an abundant life. That in itself is already a great reason to be happy, and consequently to have good relationships with others.

But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. James 3:17

At this point, it's worth asking yourself:

- Are you easy to love?
- Do you treat your family and others in a way that encourages them to want to treat you well?
- Would you dare ask your children and your spouse directly if you're easy to love?



We must be willing to ask and listen to them to see how they perceive us. We shouldn't get angry if what we hear isn't what we expected. We must take it as a challenge to be better. We must accept the responsibility of being kind to create an atmosphere of kindness in our family and relationships.

The environment of kindness is necessary for a home to be filled with the love of God. We must try everything in our power to achieve that environment.

Being nice doesn't mean tolerating the lack of discipline. Let's not get confused with a Mr. Sympathy contest. Being nice is learning to point things out properly.

6.2.3 Invest time to spend with them

Let's spend time with our children, all together as a family and with each one as an individual. Do the things they want to do and talk about things in life.

One of the typical questions regarding spending time with children is, "How much time should I spend with them?" I'll tell you that there is no standard measurement. First, think about how much your family is worth to you and what you want to achieve by spending time with them. Then from there it will be clear on how to spend time, what amount of time it should be, when, etc.

As fathers, we must teach our children to speak humbly and frankly, willing to hear their opinion. The way you talk to them and your wife teaches them a lot about how to communicate.

Take advantage of opportunities to spend time with your family. If possible, arrange your time to eat with them. Much of what they learn as children is received at the table or in the post-meal conversations. Topics can be diverse, but try to use that time wisely.

6.2.4 Let's seek to develop a relationship of mutual trust

I have good news for you. If you're already learning to be loving and show it, and you're also kind to your children, you've already begun to earn their trust.

Together with your wife, make good use of your time with the children to find out what problems they're facing and what they're thinking about what the family is experiencing. Then talk with your wife so that you can make better decisions and make good plans together.

Parents must learn to listen to their children when they want to talk. Develop the art of speaking with questions that will help them open up more. Avoid questions that can be answered with the classic teenage answers such as "yes," "no," "more or less," and so on.

6.2.5 Exercise necessary discipline

There are several reasons why we must exercise healthy discipline toward our children:

- God the Father disciplines and punishes those who rebel (Heb. 12: 5-11).
- God commands parents to discipline their children (Prov. 19:18).
- Discipline is the only way to correct a rebel (Prov. 22:15).
- Discipline is for the good of the child, but also for the whole society (Prov. 13: 1).

Remember that discipline is to be exercised with love and tenderness, not with anger. Avoid any punishment if you're angry, and make it clear that you'll come back to the topic later. At all ages this quality is important, but especially with teenagers.

Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson in "Discipline Without Tears" (p. 11) introduce the concept of "Effective Discipline." This type of discipline has a dual purpose:

- a) interrupting a bad behavior or favoring a good one,
- b) also teaching skills and nurturing, in children's brains, the connections that will help them make better decisions and function well in the future.

To carry out such discipline, Daniel J. Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson indicate that before responding to misbehavior, we should take the time to ask ourselves three simple questions:

1. Why has my child acted like this?
Since we're angry, the answer could be "because he is a spoiled child" or "because she tries to exasperate me!" However, if we approach it with curiosity and not with presuppositions, analyzing more deeply what's behind a certain behavior, it often becomes clear that the child was trying to express something, but didn't do it in the right way. If we understand this, we can respond more effectively ... and compassionately.
2. What lesson do I want to teach at this moment?
In this case the objective of the discipline is to correct a behavior. We want to teach a lesson on self-control, the importance of sharing, responsible action or whatever.
3. What is the best way to teach this lesson?
Taking into account the child's age and their development phase, together with the context (did he know that the megaphone was on when he brought it to the dog's ear?), how can we most effectively communicate what we want to be understood?

We often react to misconduct as if punishment were the purpose of the discipline. However, sometimes the child's decision results in certain natural consequences, such that the lesson is taught without our intervention. But generally, to help children understand what we're trying to communicate, there are more effective and caring ways than applying "one-size-fits-all" corrections.

If we ask ourselves these questions, we can abandon the "automatic response." In this way, we'll be able to react effectively to interrupt the behavior in the short term, and at the same time teach them important, lasting life skills and lessons. These will help them develop personally and prepare them to make good decisions in the future. As you do so, note the following:

- Remind them that even God disciplines us. The punishment for the faults that they immediately confess and for those that you observe that they did, must be administered with kindness, love, much grace.
- Together with your spouse, take your responsibility for discipline seriously. Learn to give it calmly and pray to our Heavenly Father for it to be a positive lesson for your children.
- Never punish the child twice for the same offense.
- The forms and methods of discipline change according to the age of the child. But remember to establish the respective limits ahead of time. (Siegel and Payne).

6.2.6 Practical Aspects for Healthy Parenting for Teenagers

Rosario Busquets (2017) gives us the following statements applicable to adolescents. Knowing them will help us raise our teenage children in a healthy way:

- Due to hormonal overproduction, adolescence is the period where a disorganization of behavior, emotions and thoughts is generated.
- The fact that adolescence ends does not guarantee maturity.
- Consider that possibly your child's behavior disorder isn't personal and cannot be avoided.
- The manifestations of early adolescence will vary from one child to another.
- The process ends between the ages of 18 and 21. If afterwards he/she presents attitudes typical of adolescents, what you have is an immature adult.
- Being a teenager shouldn't be automatically associated with being undisciplined.
- Your child rebels against the authority you represent, not who you are as a person. It's an attitude in a certain understandable way that will be corrected.
- Learn to be bifocal: consider the present situation but remember that what you decide to do will impact his/her future life.
- The force of adolescence can often involve you in conflicts in which you discover a version of yourself that you didn't know.
- It's extremely important to develop patience to build a proper relationship with an adolescent.
- If your child begins adolescence with a bad educational background from a young age, the effort you'll have to make will be greater.

6.3 Conclusions

We're inexperienced at parenting at first. But that doesn't exempt us from forming them from their childhood, adolescence and while they remain at home, in a healthy way, seeking to form the character of Christ in their hearts. For this, God gives us a series of principles that are in his Word and that we've studied. The basis of everything is the love relationship for each member of the family.

Without a doubt, spending time with them is another important key. No dying person, father or mother, has ever said "I wish I hadn't spent so much time with my family." Many, when it's late, regret not having given them enough time. Think about it. How do you want to finish your parenting career?

It's our responsibility to investigate the traits and characteristics that they have at each stage of their development. Doing so will make it easier for us to parent healthily. Ignoring it will cause us serious headaches, and sometimes there will be things that are very difficult to correct over time. Above all things, love God and your family as yourself!

My commitment to God:

Application exercises

1. Describe five ways you can improve the way you express your love to your children and wife.

2. Describe five ways you can build more trust with your children and wife.

3. Give examples of different ways to discipline a child.

4. Give examples of different ways to discipline a teenager.

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Lesson 7. The father's role in discipleship

Biblical Passage: *Ephesians 6:4*

Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Objective:

- **Value** the role that God has given us as fathers and assume the commitments that that entails.

7.1 Introduction

The story is told of a man who asked three construction workers what they were doing.

- The first man said that he was “laying bricks.”
- The second man described his work like this: “I’m building a wall.”
- The third man explained his genuine concern for his job. He said, “I am building a great cathedral.”

Imagine a similar question is posed to a father about his role in the family. It’s almost certain that we would get diverse answers. Each answer depends on what each father considers his role to be.

Many people, even those who consider themselves Christians, have been primarily focused on various things such as their work. Others in giving their children a professional career. Others unfortunately don’t have clear objectives.

But in this lesson, we’re going to study what the Bible says about the order of our priorities. We’ll also study what our role should be as parents toward our children?

7.2 Development

7.2.1 God wants us to be the priest of our home

God asks us to be the priests in our home. Although there is no verse expressly stating this, we have biblical grounds for assuming it. On the one hand, all believers are called to exercise the priesthood. We see it in the following passages:

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

... and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen. (Rev. 1:6)

S. Kanenungo explains to us how the father played an important role in the family life of the Israelites. God called Abraham to lead his family. He was the priest of his house. He was also called upon to protect the family. He was responsible for leading by example so that his child would follow.

"The biggest disease today isn't leprosy or tuberculosis, but rather feeling unloved, not cared for and abandoned by everyone." *Mother Teresa of Calcuta.*

Sadly, today many fathers have left their homes. The father's absence is a serious concern. "As the world faces this challenge, it also influences the role of the father who leads the family in home worship. It's no wonder that there is so much chaos in the world today. Many children grow up without their fathers being present in their lives." (Simbarashe)

Fathers have been given the authority to run their homes. God promised Abraham that he would be the father of a great nation. Abraham carried out the task that God had entrusted to him. He fulfilled his role as Isaac's father.

7.2.2 Jesus as the husband of the church

The greatest example of Priesthood in the home given by Jesus is the sacrifice of love for one's wife. In his role as husband and through his children in the role of Father, in Christ we see three examples that man as priest of the house should represent:

- **A righteous life or a good testimony:** Matthew 11:29; *"Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls."*
- **God's authority:** Matthew 7:29; *"because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law."*
- **A life of sacrifice for his family:** the cross and the sacrifice of Jesus speaks of a life that he lived to bring peace and salvation to his Family and ours.

"A man must live in such a way that everyone knows that he is a Christian ... and, above all, his family must know it."
Dwight L. Moody

7.2.3 Roles of the father

Joan Veloz (2020) identifies the following roles:

- **Leaders:** When God put man in Eden, He gave him specific instructions to lead and rule all of creation (Genesis 2:15). In the same way, God has determined that man should be the head of his household. Therefore, taking into consideration the opinion of his wife, he must establish the path by which his family must go to achieve God's purpose for them.
- **Lovers of his own:** Man is called to love his wife as Christ loved the church (Ephesians 5: 22-25, 1 Peter 3-7), and to love his children as an inheritance from the Lord, which they are (Psalm 127: 3). It's agape love, that's to say, a love that is unconditional, patient, kind, without envy, that does not get irritated, does not take into account the evil received, suffers everything, believes everything, expects everything, supports everything. This is the kind of love that God wants us to have towards our family.

- **Protectors:** In the same way that God promises to always be with those who love him, so we men must protect those of our house (2 Thessalonians 3: 3). This protection encompasses all spheres: physical, emotional and especially spiritual (1 Corinthians 16:13). As fathers and husbands, it's our responsibility to ensure not only the well-being of our family's physical bodies, but also the well-being of their souls.
- **Providers:** The provider role is clearly established in his Word. In 1 Timothy 5:8, Paul says that the man who doesn't provide for his own, and especially for his own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.
- **Priests:** In the Old Covenant, the role of the priest was to intercede before God on behalf of the people (Exodus 19:5-7); he stood before God to appeal for God's favor to those whom he represented. In the same way, we men have been appointed priests of our homes, called to faithfully cry out to our God so that He, according to his sovereign will, can show His favor and his grace upon those of our house (1 Peter 2: 5).

7.2.4 The responsibility to educate our family in the ways of the Lord.

As fathers we must educate our children in the ways of the Lord. But not only that, we must pass on that legacy so that they can later apply it to their own families.

So, focus on aspects such as:

- Teaching them to pray as soon as they begin to speak.
- Reading to your children age-appropriate books with sound doctrine and uplifting thoughts. (Deuteronomy 6:7-9)
- Not letting any sinful act go unpunished. (Proverbs 13:24)
- Encouraging respect for other people, starting at home, and for the property of others. Don't overlook things that seem insignificant. (Songs 2:15)
- Destroying the selfishness of your children and collaborate in the salvation of their souls. (Mark 12:31)
- Encouraging and rewarding good behavior.



Everything we've seen above must be the reflection of a spiritual reality. That is, it's not only about developing external behaviors, but about achieving a real transformation within.

We must move from the carnal, natural, human to the spiritual. This can only be achieved with the transforming action of the Holy Spirit. It's not simply a matter of establishing "rules" and "commands." It's about Christ being the center of the family. (Romans 12:1-2)

7.3 Conclusions

Christ loves your family and gave his life to save it. Ron Calhoun says, "Modern people don't like to hear about judgment, responsibility, and eternal life." God loves us, not just as a parent, but He wants to spend eternity with your family. In John 14:3, Jesus reminds us that he will come for us. Let's be prepared with our family to go with Him.

We may want a good career and a comfortable life for our children, but what matters is their relationship with God. All things in this world will pass away. Our priority should be focused on going to heaven with our family. For this we must be prepared all the time.

As a father, we must be a role model. Remember that from a young age they learn naturally by imitating what they see. Many times, they won't be able to distinguish if the model is good or bad, they will simply tend to repeat what they learned at home.

And as a father, you must be a teacher of your family in the important things of spiritual life, as well as in practical things that prepare them for life. Housework and house life represent good opportunities for this teaching.

My commitment to God:

Application exercises

Simbarashe Kanenungo in his book *"Intentional Family Discipleship: A Journey of Faith from One Generation to the Next"* proposes the following to help parents evaluate their lives regarding how they are discipling their children. The questions are provided as a guide for parents to assess how they are discipling children at home.

Home Faith Assessment (Check All That Apply)	Never	Sometimes	Regularly
1. We have time for devotionals together as a family every night.			
2. I try to find opportunities to have conversations about spiritual matters with my children.			
3. I have helped my children to know Christ personally			
4. We pray for any family situation.			
5. I encourage my family to read the Bible.			
6. We memorize the scriptures as a family.			
7. After church, I follow up with my children on what they have learned.			
8. I help my family have a biblical worldview about problems.			
9. We allow our children to ask any questions about life.			
10. I have shared my salvation story with my children.			

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Lesson 8. **God's process**

Biblical Passage: **Philippians 1:6**

... being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Objective:

- **Understand** that God allows us to go through trials and difficulties because he wants to see us grow and increase our faith in him.

8.1 Introduction

This time we're going through during the pandemic has been very painful for many of our families. We've had losses of very dear family members and friends. The family economy has been terribly impacted. The loneliness of not being with friends and family in a face-to-face closeness has affected us all equally, regardless of gender or age.

Some have wondered when this will all end. Others have gone further and there have been times when they wondered *Where is God in the midst of the Pandemic?* Suddenly some began, without noticing it, to put their dreams and goals aside. They began believing that many of the things they dreamed for their family, for their ministry, etc. will no longer be achievable.

Suddenly, it seems that storms have arisen one after another in our lives. I'm sorry to say that not only have some wavered in their faith, but some in our family have also turned away. That is why this present study is of the utmost importance. God wants to remind us today that this is just a process. So let's study the process of God. Why are processes necessary? What will be the result if we're faithful?

8.2 Development

8.2.1 **What is a process?**

Life with God by our side is an everyday journey. He uses every circumstance in our environment to form his character in us. Paul tells us, *"being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus."* (Phil. 1:6)

If we look at the lives of the different people that God used as instruments to bring blessings to others, we'll find that it was not an easy life. We can see it in the life of King David, everything that he had to go through from when he was anointed as king until he was finally able to assume the role of king. In the New Testament, one of many examples was Paul. His defense of his ministry reminds the Corinthians of the hardships he had to suffer for the sake of the gospel. (2 Cor. 11: 23-33). And without a doubt, as always, the very life of Our Lord Jesus is an example for us to follow.

Perhaps one of the most illustrative stories of a process is the life of Joseph, son of Jacob (Israel) described in chapters 37-50 of the book of Genesis. From a very young age, God revealed himself to Joseph in dreams. By sharing those dreams with his siblings, he began a long process of formation by God. (Gen. 37:5-11)

Since his father Jacob loved him more than all his brothers, his brothers tried to kill him out of jealousy. In the end, they decided to lock him in a cistern instead. As a caravan of merchants passed by, they sold him as a slave for 20 pieces of silver. They lied to their father by telling him a false story that a wild beast had killed Joseph. As proof, they brought him a piece of the beautiful blood-stained colored tunic that Jacob had made for Joseph.

Sometimes having dreams from God will be the cause of being disqualified by others ... sometimes by the family itself, as happened to Joseph. Look at what the Bible says about it:

So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did. (Genesis 39:22-23)

8.2.2 The processes are usually painful, and testing is part of the process.

Joseph's tests:

- **He was envied by his brothers.** His father preferred him over his siblings. He even made him a beautiful colored robe, which became a source of envy by his siblings. (Gen 37:4,5)
- **He was bought by Midianite merchants** who later sold him as a slave. (Gen 37:25-28)
- **He was sold in Egypt and bought by Potiphar.** Potiphar was a captain in the Egyptian army and held a good position before the king. Joseph soon gained his trust and was appointed steward.
- **Joseph was falsely accused by Potiphar's wife.** As part of the process, God allowed Potiphar's wife to want to seduce Joseph. Joseph always avoided her, but on one occasion, the woman managed to remove part of his clothes and accused Joseph of trying to seduce her. This angered Potiphar and he had Joseph imprisoned. (Gen. 39: 12-13)
- **He was unjustly imprisoned,** along with the king's prisoners, for a crime that he didn't commit. While in prison, Joseph was able to gain the trust of the head of the jailers and was placed as head of the guards. (Gen. 40:12-13).
- **He was forgotten for a long time** by a servant of the king when he was released from jail. On one occasion, two former servants (the cupbearer and the baker) who were unfaithful to the king and in prison with Joseph, approached him to reveal the meaning of a dream that each of them had had. For the cupbearer, the news was very good. The cupbearer would be reinstated in the king's service in three days. So Joseph asked him the favor of presenting his case to the king and pleading on his behalf. That man forgot the favor for a long time. For the other prisoner, the news was very bad, because he was going to die in three days.

We know stories of friends and brothers and sisters in the faith who have had big losses in their life. From being very loved and having the security of a home and wearing the best colored tunic given by the expressed love of a loved one, they have come to feel alone and mourning the losses. Joseph was one of them. His “colored tunic”, a sign of his father's love, was changed for other “tunics”: the tunic as a slave, the tunic as a prisoner of injustice.

But the story has a happy ending (Rom. 8:28-30). Finally, God transformed Joseph and he found a new robe - that of governor of the most powerful nation of that time, because God was with him.



8.2.3 Do things with excellence. Stay focused during the process.

A main element to help each of us progress in this new process is to keep focused on the purpose that God has for you, for your family, for your ministry and for your church. Please observe how Joseph calmly approached each part of the process:

- He was sold into slavery in Egypt, and what did he do? With God as his strength, he became the best slave in Potiphar's house. His dedication, good work and integrity was so high that he was appointed as steward by Potiphar.
- When he was in prison, he gained the trust of the jailers.
- When he was appointed governor, he continued to focus on giving honor to God.

When you read the story of Joseph, the expression “The Lord was with Joseph” will catch your attention. You’ll find it in Gen. 39:2 when Joseph was bought as a slave by Potiphar. Then you’ll find it again in Gen. 39:21

Another phrase is "Joseph found favor in his eyes and served him." We see Joseph serving in the best way in Potiphar's house until he was appointed steward. The Bible says that Potiphar “entrusted to his care everything he owned” (Gen. 39:4).

Also, while he was imprisoned, his behavior was exemplary. The bible says:

“So the warden put Joseph in charge of all those held in the prison, and he was made responsible for all that was done there. The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph’s care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did.” (Gen. 29:22-23)

Joseph was always aware that everything that was happening was the work of God. He is the one who opens doors.

- This is what Joseph said to the king's servants who were in prison with him: “*Do not interpretations belong to God?*” (Gen. 40:8).
- This is what Joseph declared to Pharaoh about being able to interpret his dream for him: “*I cannot do it,*” Joseph replied to Pharaoh, “*but God will give Pharaoh the answer he desires.*” (Gen. 41:16).

8.2.4 Growth as a result of the process

God led Joseph to serve in the king's court. This was the result of revealing to him the meaning of a dream that the king had and that no one had been able to reveal to him. It's of great importance to emphasize that Joseph never took the credit for himself, but rather recognized that this was a gift from God. (Gen 41:15-16)

Therefore, he was rewarded by being appointed governor of Egypt to manage the large crops that would come before the seven years of drought. God gave him wisdom to rule. That position would also serve to keep his own family alive during the drought. Some of his brothers would come to Egypt to buy grain that was in that region.

We can identify various areas of learning and growth for Joseph during his process. Joseph learned:

- To be humble, despite coming from a family with certain comforts.
- To serve with excellence wherever God allowed him to be.
- To let go of any resentment that he wanted to keep in his heart because of the injustice.
- That during each stage of his process, God's purposes for his life were being fulfilled.
- To value that integrity was the basis of God's approval for his life.
- That it's better to take on each trial or difficulty than to remain lamenting and blaming.
- That it was always God's grace and mercy in his life that opened doors for him.
- To bear witness to who was the source of his work and ministry.
- To rule with justice for all, including his brothers.

8.2.5 Every process has a purpose.

At the end of the story, Joseph could tell his brothers:

You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.
(Genesis 50:20-21)

But remember that in everything God works for the better. One of the great teachings is that if we want to have a Christlike character, we must be prepared to be put through various tests.

James put it like this:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)

...until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
(Eph. 4:13)

8.2.6 In the process, take care of your heart

"You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good" Joseph told his brothers. He could have gotten even for everything that had happened in his life because of his brothers. But Joseph understood that it was all part of a process from God. Joseph didn't leave Potiphar's jail resentful. Nor did he resent the cupbearer who forgot about him when he returned to serve the king, just as Joseph interpreted for him from a dream. Much less now could he hold a grudge against his own family.

***Above all else,
guard your heart, for
everything you do
flows from it.*** Prov. 4:23

8.3 Conclusions

When does this process end? I have good news and bad news for you. "The bad news" is that God never stops working in us. We'll always be in a process of growth, which will bring with it more tests.

"The good news" is that now we've learned that God is working in us to perfect his work in you and me. Isn't that great?

My commitment to God:

Application exercises

Identify the purposes that God has for you. Have any of them gotten interrupted? Pray asking God if it's his will for you to take up those dreams and goals again.

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Lesson 9. Forming a new generation ... from crystal?

Biblical Passage: *John 16:33*

I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.

Objective:

- **Understand** the high responsibility we have for the formation of the character of our family and of ourselves, with the help of the Holy Spirit.

9.1 Introduction

Have you ever heard the expression "*crystal generation*"? What do you suppose it refers to? Normally, I don't like to use labels to describe a group or generation. So I apologize in advance in case anyone feels attacked. The intention is that we learn to identify the characteristics of the people of the new generation that parents have formed.

Analyzing their characteristics will help us assess how far they are from what Jesus expects of each one of us. This will help us as fathers to take the necessary measures to correct the way we raise our children.

So in this lesson, we're going to answer the following questions: What are the characteristics of that generation? What advantages and disadvantages do these people have? As Christians, what can we do to improve their formation based on biblical principles?

9.2 Development

9.2.1 What is the crystal generation

The term is attributed to the philosopher Montserrat Nebrera in 2012. Usually it's applied to those born after the year 2000, but there is no unit of criteria on who is included. The term is used to explain that, because their parents provided everything they needed, the young people of this generation could be "unstable" or "insecure." That is, the fact that the parents sought to provide without demanding something from them made them of a "weak character."

Francisco Acuña (s.f.) points out that: These children, despite their good school education and having experienced at their young age magnificent social and cultural opportunities in anticipation of great professional expectations, have fragile emotional health.

9.2.2 Characteristics of that generation

Francisco Acuña himself mentions that:

"The Crystal Generation" is described as "delicate" (hypersensitive) who, in a good metaphor, "break" at the slightest contact with adversity. That is the key to their peculiarity, they are prepared to succeed, to triumph, to win, but if something goes wrong, if they stumble upon an obstacle that ruins the goal or the objective or are criticized by those who are not in that situation, a disproportionate intolerance towards their detractors

is unleashed in them that can culminate in anger, physical and verbal violence or, in situations of maximum pressure, in a dangerous propensity to suicide.

- They are "fragile" because there is little authority and much overprotection.
- They have a low tolerance for failure, criticism, rejection and frustration.
- They have low self-esteem, so they need constant recognition.
- They often have very little empathy.
- They have little interest in reading and culture; however, their audiovisual skills prevail.
- They are more critical of the social reality they face. They issue harsh and blunt judgment on what seems wrong to them.
- They always seek to achieve great changes.
- They use technology and social networks as a means of expressing themselves.
- There is a lack of authority in their family environment.
- Their ability to develop greater emotional intelligence vs. their emotional fragility stands out.
- They are in solidarity with global causes.
- They trust values such as friendship, courage, prudence, temperance, fortitude and justice.

9.2.3 It's not about providing everything that we didn't have

Cristopher Castellanos (2018) mentions that:

Let's return our gaze to Jesus and the disciples who gave their life, service and time to the gospel, those who did not abate for issues of architectural or religious aesthetics, and that collapsed Greek concepts with solidity and knowledge, those who, from prisons and bed of death proclaimed the Gospel, it's time to react as children of God and generation (this includes all: children, young people, adults and elderly) and present the message of hope to a society in decline. Together, we destroy the glass walls and once and for all we build our lives on the solid rock.

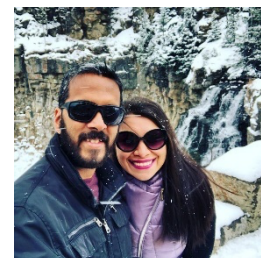
"If God's love for his children was measured by our health, wealth and comfort in this life, God hated the Apostle Paul" John Piper.

9.2.4 How to strengthen their character

The first thing we must do is recognize that we're the parents of this generation. Therefore, we're the last ones to criticize them without first assuming our responsibility for forming them that way. We must help them develop Christian values.

Ana Ma. Gurrola (2018) tells us that:

Our young people need to develop skills to face life, be able to solve their conflicts by themselves, make goals, strive to fulfill them and have a high level of frustration resistance ... in a few words ... to manage themselves.



The writers of Hebrews and James tell us:

The world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground. (Hebrews 11:38)

Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. (James 1:2-4)

9.2.5 Let's take advantage of the opportunity to help bring about the changes they support, and that society needs

Let me tell you a story in the shortest way possible. In 2012, at the age of 15, a young woman was shot by the forces of her country's government that opposed the education of women.

She then decided to lead a crusade to change the forms of her government, putting her own life at high risk. She declared, "I will continue this fight until you see all children in school."



I'll give you some facts to see if you can identify her:

- In 2013, together with her father, she established a foundation to support the education of girls and sensitize people and governments about social and economic effects.
- In 2014, at age 17, she was the youngest recipient of the Nobel Peace Prize.
- In 2017, she was named "Peace Messenger of the United Nations" to help raise awareness about the importance of girls' education.

Have you identified her? Yes, she is Malala Yousafzai. You may ask why I share this story. Well, the answer is simple. I want to tell you that this "generation of crystal" has great qualities as well as each of the generations that precede them. One is that they want great changes for their society. We must take advantage of this and other qualities to propel our young people forward.

I can assure you that I am not diverting from the task that we as a church have. God has given us an integral mission. It doesn't only include the spiritual aspect.

9.3 Conclusions

Some affirm that before being burned, John Hus (a pre-reformist martyr) said the following words: "You are going to roast a goose, but within a century, you will find a swan that you cannot roast." Reference is made that he was prophesying about the great Reformer Martin Luther. In the Wittenberg coat of arms was a swan. Thanks to the martyrs because they gave their lives for Christ.

We live to form men and women who, upon becoming Christlike, aren't paralyzed in stopping so much adversity. Let's go with them, helping to develop their character and their faith in God in every great difficulty they face.

Don't be surprised that this generation will rise against great problems of our current society, such as machismo or misogyny, the exploitation of the most needy, social injustice, the care of the environment, etc. The issue is to not continue training people "who complain about everything" but a generation that rises together to bring forth the new changes that our society needs, and that they know Christ as personal savior."

My commitment to God:

Application exercises

Share five practical ways to help form your children's character.

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Lesson 10. The father of the family as a model to follow

Biblical Passage: *John 14:9*

Jesus answered: "Don't you know me, Philip, even after I have been among you such a long time? Anyone who has seen me has seen the Father. How can you say, 'Show us the Father'?"

Objectives:

- **Make** the commitment to train your children in the fear of God through your example.

10.1 Introduction

One of the great challenges we have in life is the education of our children. Sometimes we've lacked the wisdom to do it correctly. On other occasions, we can say that we don't know how to do it. In other cases, we limit ourselves to repeating the model we observed from our own fathers.

The Bible speaks extensively about how to train our children. It also warns us that if we don't, others will take our place to educate our children, although much of the time they won't be the best models to do so.

In this lesson we're going to study, we'll look at who molds the hearts of our children when we don't assume that responsibility as fathers. How can we be models for our children to follow?

10.2 Development

10.2.1 Children learn by imitation

We must be aware that from a young age, children learn to do what they see. That is why we should be careful to take the time necessary to show them the way of being; their character is being formed from an early age.

The problem is that today, many fathers are absent from their children's lives, which terribly damages the hearts of children. In those cases, children will begin to look for other models to follow on television, from music, in the news, or their friends. The problem is that if their friends aren't Christians, they will end up being negatively affected. (1 Corinthians 15:33; Proverbs 13:20)

So, if the people of this world are obsessed with money, pleasures, and their own interests, this will be the influence that your children have if you don't assume the commitment today to invest your life in training them through your godly example.

"If there is a secular God for the adolescent, it's the God of adaptation. ... For adolescents, being different (than your friends) is worse than death."

William Brown

10.2.2 Practical tips for role modeling

Our Lord Jesus, when asked to show them the Father, replied in John 10:30: *I and the Father are one*. That is, He focused on showing the heart of the Father through all that he did.

“Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:1

Therefore, we must follow his example and consistently model the heart of God to our children.

For this we can consider some practical proposals for serving as role models:

- Include your child in family discussions and allow them to provide input on family decisions, rules, and expectations. This will help them understand how we can have good relationships and work together.
- Do the things you ask your child to do. Teenagers notice when we don't. If I ask you not to use your cell phone at lunchtime, I must lead by example.
- Maintain a positive attitude: think, act and speak optimistically. Please avoid always complaining about the difficult times that you have had to live through. Undoubtedly, a tragic contrast between the perspective of pessimists and optimists is found in the report of the 12 spies (Numbers 12 and 13) who went to spy out the land that God had already given to his people. Ten of them were extremely pessimistic, doubting what God had promised and causing their entire generation to wander for 40 years in the desert without being able to enter the promised land. In contrast, two of the twelve (Joshua and Caleb) were optimistic and God used them 40 years later to conquer the promised land.
- We must have the humility to admit our mistakes and talk about what we could do differently to avoid making those mistakes again. If they see us fall into the same mistakes, our apologies will be of no use.
- Avoid blaming other people or circumstances for everything that goes wrong. The great defect of blaming others for what we do wrong is very old. When God asked Adam *"Have you eaten from the tree that I forbade you to eat from?"* Adam replied: *"The woman that you gave me gave me the fruit of the tree and I ate of it"* (Gen. 3: 11,12). That is, he blamed the woman for him having yielded to sin.
- Use problem solving skills to deal with challenges or conflicts in a calm and productive way. Be aware that getting angry and upset when a problem arises encourages your child to respond in the same way.



“You have an important influence on your children's values and choices. The stronger your relationship with your children, the more influence you'll have. Parents are powerful role models for teens. What you do and say guides their behavior, their attitudes and beliefs, now and in the long term.”

10.2.3 Your influence on your teenager

You are an important influence on your child.

Friends and peers influence your child, but so do you - it's just that peer influence is different from yours. Your child's friends are likely to influence everyday behavior, such as the music she listens to or the clothes he wears. But as a father, you can and should influence them with Christian values and issues related to their future, such as educational options.

The stronger your relationship with your child, the more influence you'll have. That's because he/she values your good opinions, advice, support, and help. In fact, it's likely that when your child becomes a young adult, they will end up with values, beliefs, and behaviors similar to yours. (2 timothy 1:5)

Teenagers need you to stay in touch with them and what they're doing. Take an interest in what they do with their friends without invading their space by balancing privacy and trust. Be creative in knowing the things that are of interest to them. Don't consider their interests as unimportant, because remember that we also lived in each of those stages and those things were of great importance at that time of our childhood and adolescence.

Your influence on your teen's attitudes and behavior.

You can influence many aspects of your teen's behavior, as well as their attitudes. Here are some of the areas and ways you can influence your child:

Friendships

When your child was much younger, you probably influenced the friends she made by managing her social activities.

In adolescence, you still have an indirect influence on your child's friendships. You must help shape their attitudes and values, which in turn shape their choice of friends.

It may seem that because teens and their friends are alike, they are influencing each other. But the main reason friends are similar is that teens often choose to be friends with people who are just like them.

Respectful relationships

Help your child choose and build respectful relationships by modeling respectful and caring behavior in your own relationships. What he sees in your daily dealings will be "a norm" for his behavior. Even if you come across relationships that cause difficulties for you, be sure to treat those people like you want your child to treat others. Address them respectfully, and if necessary, seek professional help.

Be diplomatic to others. For example, you can use expressions such as "I can't join you for coffee today because I promised to take my son to see a movie." This helps your teenager learn important skills and ways of relating to others.

Addictions such as pornography, alcohol, and other addictions

As parents we must provide our children with an example. Don't ignore the peer pressure they face to experiment with pornography, alcohol, and other addictions. You can try to dissuade your child from trying alcohol by talking about it and other drugs, the effects and risks involved.

But if you have problems with alcohol or drug use, you'll negatively influence your child's attitudes and behavior. Be an example for safe habits.

Talk to your child about how harmful addictions to pornography can be. In pornography, women are seen simply as objects for personal gratification instead of God's beautiful and valued daughters. Colossians 3:5: *Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.*

Healthy lifestyle

You can model a healthy lifestyle by eating well and exercising regularly. You could involve your child, for example, in swimming together or taking the whole family for a walk together. Ephesians 5:29: *After all, no one ever hated their own body, but they feed and care for their body, just as Christ does the church.*

You can also try to avoid making negative comments about your body, their body, and also those of other people. This sends important messages about body image and acceptance.

Attitude toward learning

Seek to instill in them the attitude that education is interesting and enjoyable. This will increase the likelihood that your child will have a positive attitude toward school and learning. At home, our daughters grew up watching us study for life (postgraduate, diploma, refresher courses, etc.). For example, your children can learn a language or trade, or they can read about a practical topic that interests them. They could even spend time reading for pleasure. This is a great way to motivate them to read and study.

Use of technology

The way we use technology sends strong messages to our children about its place in our family's life. For example, if you're always checking the messages on your cell phone, or looking at unimportant things on the internet, it will indicate that this is more important to you than your own family. But if, on the contrary, you take a few minutes to check your social networks and then go out for a family walk, that certainly sends the message that social networks are just an option to entertain and relax.

10.3 Conclusions

Children need guidance on many issues during their development, and as they grow older, the required guidance is more complex. For children to learn to make decisions in life, fathers, in addition to being their guides, can also share their criteria for decision-making so that their children learn by example.

By showing children moral and ethical behavior, fathers will also be imparting values that can counteract the negative influences that children may receive from friends, schoolmates or the media.

The responsibility to be a good role model can also encourage fathers to improve the situation in their lives. For example, if we cause an accident and try to flee, we'll send a negative message. But if we stay and assume our responsibility, we'll be a great constructive example of change. Remember that love is the foundation of every relationship.

My commitment to God:

Application exercises

1. Determine five negative habits that you're willing to eliminate from your life for a better formation of your children.

2. Decide on five positive habits that you're willing to adopt to better train your children.

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Lesson 11. **Renewing our understanding. Eradicating paradigms that denigrate women.**

Biblical Passage: **Rom. 12:1-2**

Therefore, I urge you, brothers and sisters, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God—this is your true and proper worship. ² Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Objectives:

- **Value** women according to what God has established.

11.1 Introduction

We live in an imperfect society with big problems. Many of these problems affect Christian families as well. One of the things that we might do, allow, or even encourage, is the unworthy treatment of girls and women.

The enemy has done us a lot of harm in this regard. At times we've been participants in a macho culture in which women are less valued. But in recent times, women have risen up to denounce various types of harassment they suffer which before they didn't dare denounce. Government surveys on family dynamics tell us that women suffer various types of violence, and sadly, much of this violence is experienced in their own homes.

We live in a macho culture that tolerates infidelity by men, but denigrates women in a great way when they are unfaithful. It's not about giving freedom to be unfaithful, but about giving the place that both men and women have equally before God.

In the current context in many households, the woman already has to go out to work all day and then return home to take care of the housework, take care of the children, etc. We must stop and review all those ways of thinking that we've inherited or allowed to enter our homes. In this lesson, we're going to see: What kind of values should we teach our children so that they respect men and women equally? What types of violence exists, and identify if they are present in our homes? What are micromachoisms and why should we eradicate them?

11.2 Development

11.2.1 *God made us equal*

The first thing to keep in mind is that God made us equal. It's true that in God's design we have different roles, but that doesn't make men superior to women.

Regina Novelo, cited by M. Espinoza (2021), explains that:

We educate men (making them see that) they have to be noisy, strong, brave, rude, don't cry, and don't show their feelings, and so when a child suffers abuse, they cannot say it, or it sends erroneous messages that men are stronger or superior than women.

11.2.2 Basic values to promote

We must be aware that everything we do and say teaches something to our children. Unfortunately, we've often adopted the values of society, which don't coincide with those of the Kingdom of God. We accept the distorted stereotypes of society about the roles of women and men.

Men are taught to take power. These stereotypes don't allow us to build a behavior where women are treated respectfully. Our society educates women to depend on men, so that men have the last word and women are unable to disagree or give their opinions.

Note that if a girl is told from a young age that "when she's quiet, she looks prettier," that she has to be docile, affectionate, that she's pretty because she is thin or because of her dress, you're putting her at risk because we're teaching her to base her worth on external things. If we say to the boy, "how strong, how bold, how brave you are", then we make him believe that he shouldn't cry or be afraid. (Espinoza, 2021).

Therefore, we must learn to educate our children with the values of the Kingdom of God by:

- **Model by example.** Remember that our children are always observing us, so practice what you teach them, even without being conscious of it.
- **Women and men deserve the same respect.** Disrespect of children towards women shouldn't be tolerated, and thus they will learn that offending women is unacceptable behavior. Definitely don't "celebrate" such situations just because the child "is young" and "it seemed funny the way he said it."
- **Love must be given to our children without distinction of gender.** Don't look down on your daughters. Avoid expressions that make them feel of less value than male children.
- **Give your daughters the same opportunities for development as your sons.**
- **Infuse your child with godly character.** Parents are their children's first teachers. Use your interaction time with them to teach them to value women.
- **Reward your son for times when he strives to love, respect, and value women, starting with his sisters and his mother.** Let them know that it's cowardly to hurt a woman.
- **Exercise necessary discipline when you hear your children, usually teens and young people, express themselves in a contemptuous and disrespectful way toward women.** That includes avoiding expressions such as "my son always has lots of girlfriends."
- **It's very important to explain to them that we're different, that we're all valuable, and it's important to express what they feel.** This is key to educating your son so that he respects women.



- ***Teach your daughters and sons to respect themselves.*** Teach them to take care of their own body and those of others. If they learn this, no one will abuse them and they in turn won't hurt others because they will understand that other people's bodies are as sacred and valuable as their own.
- ***Educate your sons to maintain respectful relationships in their courtships.*** Self-respect and control of emotions are basic teachings so that a man can know how to take care of himself and the girl. When he goes out with her, he will know how to say no to inappropriate provocations or invitations. 1 Cor. 6:19
- ***Show the best behavior towards your wife.*** Without a doubt, the highest example that we can give our children about loving and respecting women is by being faithful and respectful to our wife.

Respect for ourselves guides our morals. Respect for others guides our manners. That learning begins at home. *Laurence Sterne*

11.2.3 Handing out the household duties

One way to educate your children is by teaching them to be responsible. As parents, you must be careful not to spoil your children too much. You should teach them how to help instead of the parents doing all the work. You have to actively assign tasks to them. Remember that sons can also wash dishes, sweep, make their beds, etc. You should make them feel a responsibility to help out at home. A boy who grows up thinking that housework is "women's work" is quite likely to develop misogynistic attitudes in his relationships in the future.

So, don't promote the attitude that only girls have to take care of the home and the children in everything, and that the boys don't have to help out with the chores.

11.2.4 Rejecting all types of violence against women and girls

Gender violence is that which is exercised on women by those who have or have had emotional relationships (partners or ex-partners). The purpose of the aggressor is to cause harm and exercise control over the woman. For this, violence occurs repeatedly.

The big problem is that the damage is done not only to mothers, but also to children. Sofia Mas, cited by Karmen Pascual (2021), tells us: "The main model of a couple's relationship that a child has is that of his/her parents, both among themselves and with other people, in the event of separation or divorce."

Therefore, it's essential to know how to educate our children to end gender violence. Karmen Pascual (2021):

- **Lead by example.** Avoid all kinds of violence, especially if it's towards a woman. Remember that our children observe and listen to us continuously, so it's important that among the adults who educate these minors, there are relationships based on love, respect, equality, and an equitable sharing of family care.

- It's normal for conflicts to arise, but they must be resolved in a healthy way and taking care of relationships. Avoid name calling, yelling and all kinds of aggression or violence. Rather, demonstrate respectful ways of dealing with conflict, such as talking or taking time to cool off. If possible, have your own children participate in the solution.
- This treatment based on communication and respect must also include our sons and daughters, especially when setting limits and consequences. The use of violence, both verbal and physical, makes violent behavior "normal," and it will seem normal to them if they suffer abuse from their partners, which makes it more difficult to detect the first signs of abuse.
- Remember that violence can also be verbal. Eliminate all expressions such as "Ignore her, your mom is crazy ...", etc.
- Avoid listening to music or watching movies and television shows that show disrespectful behavior towards women. But if you see a scene on television, film or real life that distorts the respectful treatment of women, you should take the opportunity to teach your children about it.

Violence has been shown to beget more violence. Don't push your children to anger, don't provoke them, don't attack them. Doing that hurts them a lot and you'll only sow resentment.

Parents and families must be alert if any of our daughters are suffering from gender violence. For this, we're recommended to pay attention to behaviors such as:

- **Changes in the way they dress or wear make-up.** Take notice if they begin to wear loose clothing if they didn't do so before, or cover up or hide more of their body, or put on less makeup if they liked it before.
- **Changes in their mood.** Although it's normal that in adolescence mood changes are common, in the case of victims of violence, more sadness, anxiety, decreased academic performance, and less communicative attitudes are perceived.
- **Idealizing her partner,** as well as the relationship she has with him, and minimizing behaviors that aren't acceptable.
- **Isolation or withdrawal from friends.** When you start a relationship, it's normal to spend less time with other people or activities, but it can be an alarm signal when hobbies, friendships, and everything that doesn't revolve around the abuser are abandoned.

Respecting women is not, nor should it be, an altruistic act; respect is a value that must be kept in mind for all people.

11.2.5 *Prohibit micromachismos from starting at home*

According to the National Population Council (s.f.), the term “micromachismos” was proposed by the psychologist Luis Bonino Méndez in 1991 to refer to those attitudes, practices and subtle mechanisms of domination of males over females that are learned from childhood. "They are practices of violence that arise in everyday life and that are naturalized, legitimized and made invisible, carried out consciously or not."

These types of attitudes, which are transmitted culturally, are usually learned during childhood and we can avoid them by changing the educational models that we offer children. The term “micro” refers to the fact that, due to their size, they sometimes seem imperceptible. Let’s be aware of not permitting or teaching them:

- Saying/enforcing that housework is just for women.
- Using expressions like “pretty like her mom and smart like her dad.”
- Telling boys that they are “acting like a woman” when they show weakness or cry.
Destructive and sexist "labels" must be removed. This negative language causes low security, increased guilt, and low self-esteem.
- Telling the boy when he comes home from school and tells us that others are bothering him, to hit the other child and not to let him go. In this way, we’re only generating violent citizens who don’t learn to dialogue. We must teach them to develop the ability to negotiate, to be tolerant. (Espinoza, 2021)
- Promoting only the education of male children because later the girls will marry and no longer go to work.
- Saying that girls cannot play soccer, they cannot practice such activities... only men.

11.3 Conclusions

The first thing to consider is that everything we teach at home must necessarily be accompanied by example. Don’t hesitate to ask for help if you’re experiencing gender violence. Be a role model, even if your kids don't see you. Avoid glances, comments or rude suggestions to women while walking down the street, etc.

My commitment to God:

Application exercises

1. Identify four micromachismos that occur in your context

2. Identify at least three negative behaviors that you're determined to eliminate, and at least three positive behaviors that you're willing to adopt in your family to give and emphasize the value that girls and women have.

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Lesson 12. Being loved by Jesus

Biblical Passage: *1 John 4:7*

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God.

Objective:

- **Evaluate** the spiritual state in which we find ourselves, and undergo a process of renewal to learn to walk with Jesus and be transformed into his likeness.

12.1 Introduction

Many times, we've heard the stories of men and women that God has used to build his Kingdom. We usually think of them as supermen and superwomen. But at the time of being chosen and called by God, these people weren't usually "super."

If you have the opportunity to reread and study about Jesus' disciples again, you'll find that as John MacArthur mentions, they were ordinary men. This represents a challenge for us to be people that God can also use in a great way. We want Christ to be able to fulfill his purposes through each one of us, common men like the disciples were.

So we must meditate on where the key points are. Can any of us be used by God in a big way? What does God ask of us? What does he want to do to accomplish His purpose in our life?

12.2 Development

12.2.1 How has God shown us that he loves us?

One of the most powerful weapons that the enemy of our soul has is to make us feel that we're not loved. He wants to make us feel at times unworthy of receiving love from others. That blocks us and prevents us from loving others. That's why it's important to remember and be grateful for what God has done out of love for us.

Do you know how much God loves you ... how important you are to Him? There are many ways that we can see God's love for us. Remembering some of them will be important to see how you yourself can in turn love others.

Let's review this list, which does not claim to be complete at all:

1. Jesus laid down his life for us on the cross, because of our sins. How much are we willing to suffer for others? (1 John 4:9)
2. Jesus sought to heal the sick. What are we doing for those in need?
3. Even when he was on the cross, he thought of his mother and left her in the hands of John. What kind of care are we providing for our family?
4. He was no respecter of persons. Are we "selective" about who we should love? What has been the criteria so far to decide who to love and who not to love? Can you make a list of those that the enemy has "blocked" you from loving?

5. He forgave our sins. How grateful are we for that? What are we doing as a result of our gratitude? Have we learned to forgive others?
6. Jesus loves children. How much do you enjoy children? Do you love them all or do only the children of your family seem "adorable"?
7. He never left the disciples alone and promised to always be with us. Can you think of some times where you experienced his presence in the midst of great pain or great difficulty?
8. Jesus came looking for us because we were lost in sin. Are we aware that had it not been for Jesus' sacrifice, we would be condemned to death because of our sin? Are we dealing with sin that we need to acknowledge before God and urgently ask for his help?
9. Jesus always took special care of those most in need. (Matt. 25:40) On a day-to-day basis, who are the most needy people around you? What have you been doing for them?
10. For the Father's sake, Jesus obeyed, even suffering death on the cross. Have we been obedient to the Father? How are we loving others? Have we shared the message of salvation with people who don't yet have Him as their personal Savior?

Do you realize how much Jesus loves you? For this reason, Jesus asks us to love him and our neighbor in the same way that we love ourselves. (Mark 12:29-31)

12.2.2 Let's get to know a little more about John, "the son of thunder."

In his work "Twelve ordinary men," John MacArthur (2004) helps us see what each of the disciples were like before they met Jesus and during the beginning of their ministries, and how Jesus and his grace were with them, leading them through a wonderful process of growth, working to spread the message of salvation in Christ, which continues to this day.

As a matter of space, we'll illustrate that Christlike maturing process through just one of these disciples, who is called "the beloved disciple." Let's start by getting to know John a little more early on in his call. Again, the work of John MacArthur will be of great help to us. What was John's character and personality like?

- He was James' younger brother, and at first they were always seen together. The two had similar temperaments.
- John was with James, ready to call down fire from heaven against the Samaritans.
- He was also in the middle of the debate about which of the disciples was the most important.
- He had great zeal and showed ambition.
- John was tough and rough, like the rest of the fisherman disciples.
- He rebuked a man for casting out demons in the name of Jesus because the man was not part of the group of disciples (Mark 9:38).

Many times, the enemy deceives us into believing that we cannot be used by God for great things. But the truth is, God through his grace chooses even the vilest sinners from among the wicked and transforms them into true instruments of blessing. So, we must hold on to that promise. With all the imperfections that we have, when we bow at the feet of Christ, He will take care of transforming us as he did to John, the beloved disciple.

12.2.3 John goes from being the son of thunder to being "the beloved disciple."

We have seen the character and personality of John. This is who Jesus called to the ministry and would later transform so that he would be a blessing by building his church and spreading the good news. We must not forget that God loves us so much and he has wonderful plans for each of us. Let's see what he tells us in the next passage:

For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. (Jeremiah 29:11-13)

There were, among others, two great factors that marked John in a great way:

- 1) The great love he received from Jesus
- 2) Being filled with the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

The great love he received from Jesus. Love was a quality that John learned from Christ. We have said that he had a tough character and his jealousy created problems in a bad way. But the love that distinguished him in his mature age was not something that sprang spontaneously from him. Living for about three years with Christ and his other disciples shaped his character.

His writings, which are among the last to be written in the entire New Testament, reflect great maturity and stand out for a genuine love of Christ and neighbor. That's why he's known as the disciple of love.

So, having undergone such a radical transformation in his life, John encourages and exhorts us by saying: *"for everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith."* (1 John 5:4)

John was filled with the Holy Spirit. John saw the years of his old age pass in a very different way than his early days as Jesus' disciple. John MacArthur explains it like this: *"Under the control of the Holy Spirit, all his handicaps were turned into advantages. When you compare the young disciple with the elder patriarch, you will see that as he matured, his spheres of great weaknesses became his strongest points."*

So John is a formidable example of what can happen to us as we grow in Christ, letting the Lord's strength be made perfect in our weakness. Therefore, one of our highest priorities should be to seek the filling of the Holy Spirit.

Here we must pause and try to be as honest as possible with ourselves. At what stage of Christian maturity am I? Have I been saved by the grace of God? Have I been sanctified by that same grace in Christ? What is the overwhelming evidence that this is a reality in my life? In case we don't have that experience of sanctification, let's seek that as our first request to Christ.

12.2.4 The experience of receiving the love of Jesus and your close relationship with him

Without a doubt, John's maturity was a process as he built that love relationship with Christ. But to capture that level of love and trust, let's take a look at John 13:22-23. We see John there as someone who is already calm and still, leaning on Jesus. What an extraordinary experience that must have been! Physically, it's no longer possible for you to do that. But I invite you to connect in a very intimate way to Jesus' heart. There we'll find what's in the heart of the Father, because they are One.

If you're studying this lesson with others, make a collective attempt to describe what you'll find in the heart of God. I remind you right now what John found: "God is love." (1 John 4:8) Now it's your turn to describe, with all your human limitations, what Jesus' heart looks like on the inside. Let me ask you some questions to provoke reflection:

- Would you be in Jesus' heart? How can you substantiate your answer?
- Would your family be there?
- Are the people who are now suffering around us there? Did Jesus suffer with them?
- What place do the lost occupy in Jesus' heart?



John was able to see all of this. Thanks to his intimate closeness to Jesus, his life became one full of love for others.

12.3 Conclusions

Jesus loves us very much. Like many others, we've accepted Christ as our personal savior. But maybe we still have personality problems or are struggling with some sin.

After experiencing God's love, and connecting in an intimate way with his heart, we can no longer be the same as we were before.

But if we want to continue growing in grace, we're now faced with the urgent need to be filled by the Holy Spirit.

With these two experiences, we can never look at the people around us in the same way as before. I encourage you to take one more step forward. As with John, Jesus' love will bring us the growth we need.

Pray to imitate the example of the disciple John, who stood to the end with a deep and abiding love for God's truth, and was faithful to proclaim it to the end. May God fill our hearts so that we cannot remain silent before others about sharing the good news of hope in Christ.

My commitment to God:

Application exercises

1. How has God shown us that he loves us? List at least 5 ways you have experienced God's love.

2. As disciples like John, there are many things that we need to have transformed by God. What things do you need God to help you change? Write down at least the 3 main ones.

3. What must you do so that your life is transformed by the Holy Spirit?

4. How can you show your children the love that God has put in you? Write down at least 5 ways.

5. How can you show the love that God has placed in you to those who don't have Christ as their Savior? Write down at least 5 ways.

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Annex

John Wesley's questions for people to examine themselves

Here we expand on the questions that John Wesley used to help people examine themselves. Today these questions can still motivate us and make us think. We invite you to meditate on them. It would be great if you could use these regularly in your men's small group!

1. Am I consciously or unconsciously creating the impression that I am better than I really am? In other words, am I a hypocrite?
2. Am I honest in all my words and actions, or am I exaggerating?
3. Do I secretly tell one person what another person confidentially told me?
4. Am I trustworthy?
5. Am I a slave to fashion, friends, work, or habits?
6. Am I self-conscious, sorry for myself, or justify my actions?
7. Does the Bible live in me today?
8. Do I let the Bible speak to me every day?
9. Am I pleased with my prayer life?
10. When was the last time I shared my faith with someone?
11. Do I pray about how I should spend my money?
12. Do I go to bed and wake up at a suitable time?
13. Do I disobey God in anything?
14. Do I insist on doing something that my conscience does not approve of?
15. Am I defeated in any part of my life?
16. Am I jealous, impure, critical, irritable, picky, or distrustful?
17. How do I spend my free time?
18. Am I proud?
19. Do I thank God that I am not like other people, like the Pharisee despised the publican?
20. Is there someone I fear, dislike, reject, criticize, ignore, or whom I resent? If so, what am I doing to change that?
21. Do I constantly grumble or complain?
22. Is Christ real to me?