

Nazarene Discipleship International (NDI)



Adult Ministries

Manual for Men in the Image of God 2024

By: Ángel Rodríguez Gómez
Mesoamerica Region.

Manual for **Men in the Image of God 2024**

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By His Grace

...A Vision of Fruitfulness

Church of the Nazarene
Mesoamerica Region



Adult Ministries

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Study Guide for Men

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Presentation

Nazarene Discipleship International (NDI) of the Church of the Nazarene develops Adult Ministries, Youth Ministries, and Children's Ministries.

This material is part of NDI's Adult Ministry, and its objective is to help members of the Church of the Nazarene to know what the Bible teaches concerning the holy life that men are called to and how to put that holy life into practice in their daily lives, in order to grow in the likeness of Jesus Christ.

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

A. Spiritual:

- Motivate men to consecrate themselves to the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- To conduct personal evangelism with others.
- To strengthen their worship of God and their devotional life.

B. Ministerial:

- Recognize that men have a responsibility for the preservation and growth of God's work.
- To work towards the betterment of their lives personally, within the family, and as a part of their church.
- To facilitate the service of men in the church.

C. Personal and Family:

- Apply biblical principles and values to personal Christian living.
- To build their homes on the principles and values of the Kingdom of God as manifested in the Bible.
- Apply biblical principles and values to ensure a good marriage relationship.
- Apply biblical principles and values to their parenting.

This book contains 12 lessons that can be shared once a month in the men's meetings.

Each lesson contains:

Learning Objectives.

They refer to the achievements expected from the student at the end of the lesson.

Introduction.

The initial presentation that contextualizes the topic to be addressed, in order to give the reader some background.

Development of the topic.

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

Conclusion of the lesson.

A brief conclusion of what has been taught is provided at the end of each lesson, which can be used at the end of the class as closure and in the next session to review the topics covered.

Exercises.

Suggested individual or group learning exercises which are related to the topic studied in each lesson. These exercises can be reproduced for the participants to use, although it is recommended that each participant have his own book.

Lesson 1. **Jesus Demands That** *We Live a Fruitful Life*

Biblical Text: John 15:16

"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you."

Objectives:

- **To meditate** on the kind of fruit we bear.
- **To implement** the necessary changes in our Christian life to bear much fruit.

1.1 Introduction

When we have been saved, our life begins to be transformed. The Bible declares that we are new creations. Therefore, different things are expected of us. One of them is that we bear fruit, much fruit. The word fruit is mentioned six times in the first ten verses of John, chapter 15.

Fruit is a metaphor used in the Bible to describe the outward manifestation of our inner disposition. Our "fruit" comprises such things as our behavior, attitude, words, and thoughts.

So, it's of utmost importance to see what kind of fruit we bear when we are unsaved and what kind of fruit we should bear when we are saved by grace. It is also important to analyze, in the light of John 15, what the conditions are that must be fulfilled in order to have a fruitful life. This is what our lesson today is all about.

1.2 Development

1.2.1 Jesus asks us to bear fruit, much fruit

Eig Blog (2020) points out that being fruitful in the context of John 15:1-16 refers to:

- a personal spiritual life that grows in the Lord by depending on Him and obeying Him,
- the mission we have to make disciples in the likeness of Christ.

Our fruit is fruit that is outwardly and tangibly expressed to others (consistent Christian character), especially to those who do not know Christ.

It is important not to confuse bearing fruit with doing some "good deeds". Without having Christ as a personal Savior, a person can:

- Help other people.
- Avoid using bad words.
- Even go to church.

But if they do not have Christ as their personal Savior they will go to damnation. Non-Christians are not motivated by love for Jesus and their purpose is not to glorify God. Rather, they are motivated by self-righteousness with the intention of appearing righteous before men or gaining some personal advantage. Furthermore, there is no way that good works can be substituted for Jesus' sacrifice on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins. Good works come after we become Christians as a result of the love of Christ that dwells in us.

1.2.2 What kind of fruit do we bear?

In Galatians 5:19-24 the Bible teaches us what our works (what we produce) are when we are without Christ and when we have Christ as our Savior.

A. Fruit produced by those who are not in Christ

In Galatians 5:19-21 the Bible teaches us what our fruits are when we walk without Christ.

¹⁹ "The acts of the flesh are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; ²⁰ idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions ²¹ and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like. I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God."

This bad behavior (bad fruits) is the natural result of being born with a bad heart. This is because we are born with a sinful nature and therefore naturally produce bad fruit.

Scripture says:

"All of us also lived among them at one time, gratifying the cravings of our flesh and following its desires and thoughts. Like the rest, we were by nature deserving of wrath." Ephesians 2:3

Martin Luther's Bible Commentary (Biblia work, n.d.) expresses it by saying:

The flesh manifests itself in sexual immorality and indecency (adultery ... lewdness), in occult and idolatrous worship (sorcery), and in other acts such as murder, drunkenness and unseemly behavior (orgies). But it is also present in sins that are socially accepted, such as anger, strife, dissensions, heresies (Gr. haireseis, "false beliefs" or "discord"), and even envy...and the like: It shows that this is a representation rather than a complete list of such sins (see 1 Corinthians 6:9, 1 Corinthians 6:10 for a different list).

We must emphasize what the apostle Paul says regarding those who practice these works of the flesh (or thoughts). They will not inherit the Kingdom of God. But God in His great mercy has the answer to avoid such an end. He has given us Christ, who, on the basis of His sacrifice on the cross, allows us to be saved by His grace, recognizing such sacrifice as sufficient for our salvation.

B. Fruit produced by those who are saved

That same passage goes on to say:

²² "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires." Galatians 5:22-24



In the Christian realm, being fruitful is not something that is achieved by the sheer willpower of an individual, but only by the power of God and The Holy Spirit working in and through the believer. To be fruitful, then, is a work of God's grace. We can see this in various passages, such as:

"...for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose." Philippians 2:13

"But by the grace of God I am what I am, and his grace to me was not without effect. No, I worked harder than all of them—yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me." 1 Corinthians 15:10

"Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!" 2 Corinthians 5:17

There is no doubt that love, joy, peace, etc. can only come from God. These are the inexhaustible fruits of divine grace in the soul. So, we must stop and reflect on what kind of works (or fruit) we are producing. Are we producing carnal works committed against our neighbor, against God and against ourselves? We cannot deceive ourselves, for the Word says that: *Now the works of the flesh are evident.*

Do the fruits I bear reflect that I walk in the Spirit?

1.3 Conclusion

We have learned that faith without fruit is not real faith (James 2:17). A life transformed by the Holy Spirit cannot remain unproductive. Being filled with His love will move us to act accordingly and show the love that is in us to those around us.

Let's keep in mind that it is impossible to judge good fruit by mere external acts. Truly, a transformed life is more than appearances. We may fool some people for a while, but God knows the motive of every action, word or thought we have.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application.

1. In the Christian context, what does it mean to be fruitful?

2. Can a victorious Christian in Christ live without bearing fruit? What does the Bible say about this?

3. What kind of fruit do you think a mature Christian should bear?

4. Name some possible reasons why some Christians do not bear the fruit that is expected of them.

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Lesson 2. **Requirements for Having a Fruitful Life**

Biblical Text: John 15:2

"He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."

Objectives:

- **To meditate** on the kind of fruit we bear.
- **To implement** the necessary changes in our Christian life to bear much fruit.

2.1 Introduction

In the previous lesson we saw that Jesus demands from His disciples a fruitful life. With this we give honor to the Father.

We also studied that in reality every human life produces fruit. But we distinguished between the fruits of the flesh and the fruits of living a life in the Spirit.

In the same portion of John 15:1-17 we find at least three requirements that we need to do so that God can work through our lives and we can bear Fruit of the Spirit. We are going to study these requirements in this lesson.

2.2 Development

2.2.1 Basic Requirements to be able to lead a fruitful life

In John 15:1-17 we find the following requirements set forth by our Lord Jesus:

- 1) Remain in me (Christ). John 15:4a
- 2) Be pruned. John 15:2b
- 3) Love as He loves us. John 15:12

Next, we are going to study in detail what each one of these requirements implies for our life in Christ.

2.2.2 First requirement: Remain in Jesus.

The first condition to being able to produce good fruit is to remain in Christ. The Bible says:

"Remain in me, as I also remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing." John 15:4-5

"Remaining in Christ means allowing His Word to fill our mind, direct our will, and transform our affections," according to Sinclair Ferguson. Some characteristics of abiding in Christ are (Kevin, 2021):

1. Remaining in Christ means to believe in Jesus Christ. *"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them."* John 6:56.
2. Remaining in Christ means living in humble dependence on Him throughout our lifetime.
3. Remaining in Christ means remaining in the Words of Christ. "Remaining in His Word" implies (Luis de Miguel, n.d.):
 - It is much more than the mere intellectual acceptance of certain Christian doctrines,
 - It implies the practical fulfillment of its demands,
 - Trusting in His promises, adopting His vision of the purpose of human life in the decisions we make.
 - To depend on Him and trust that He will supply all that is necessary to bear fruit for His glory.
 - To be sustained by Him to achieve His purposes, to be loyal and faithful to His principles, to be fervent in communion with the Lord through prayer,
 - To participate with devotion in worship and work in the Church of Christ together with the other members.

Some portions of Scripture that support this, are:

- *"The one who keeps God's commands lives in him, and he in them. And this is how we know that he lives in us: We know it by the Spirit he gave us."* 1 John 3:24
- *"To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, 'If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.'" John 8:31-32.*
- *"If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you."* John 15:7

4. Remaining in Christ means obeying Christ's commandments.

²¹ *"Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me. The one who loves me will be loved by my Father, and I too will love them and show myself to them."*

²³ *"Jesus replied, 'Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and we will come to them and make our home with them.'" John 14:21, 23*

5. Remaining in Christ means remaining in the love of Christ.

"As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commands and remain in his love." John 15:9–10

2.2.3 Second Requirement: To be cleansed (pruned)

A. What does it mean to be cleansed

This Greek word for "shall cleanse" is the same word translated as purify in other places. The same word can be used for "prune" or "purify" in ancient Greek. The farmer cleanses the vine that bears fruit so that it will bear more fruit. (Enduring Word 2021).

- a. *"If neglected, a vine can produce a good deal of unproductive growth. For greater productivity extensive pruning is essential."* (Morris)

- b. "Dead wood is worse than unfruitfulness, for dead wood can harbor disease and decay...God removes the dead wood from His church and disciplines the believer's life so that it is directed to fruitful activity." (Tenney)
- c. "Better to be pruned to grow than cut down to burn." (Trapp)

B. What is the purpose of being cleansed?

The Word clearly indicates the purpose of being pruned by God. John 15:2b *"He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful."*

"Better to be pruned to grow than cut down to burn." (Trapp)

C. Examples of how God can prune us

For many, God prunes us by using the trials, difficulties, or storms that we face in our lives. In the Bible, we can find many examples of this. But remember that the purpose is that we come out stronger and can then bear more fruit. Some examples we find are:

The life of the Apostle Paul was full of trials.

In 2 Corinthians 11:16-33 some of Paul's sufferings as an apostle are described.

But it is important to emphasize that, in spite of all this, we can see that Paul (Luis de Miguel, n.d.):

- Did not harbor resentment. On the contrary, Paul went so far as to affirm that *"we also glory in our sufferings."* (Romans 5:3)
- Did not give up. Paul never turned back. Nothing made him back down or give up. Luis de Miguel tells us:

Paul is a good example of this iron will to go on without giving up. We can remember all the calamities that Paul and Barnabas had to go through on their first missionary journey. When they arrived back home, many in their place would have thought that enough was enough, that they had already paid the price. But Paul was not like that. After a short time, he sought out Barnabas with the purpose of returning again to the same places where they had been before, and this knowing that they would most likely have problems again (Acts 15:36).

- Was not discouraged. In spite of so many problems, Paul was not discouraged. He was in the power of God.
- Did not change his attitude even when he faced trials. It is very interesting to study the occasion when Paul and Silas were beaten with rods and imprisoned in Philippi. Acts 16:23-25 describes that at midnight they sang hymns to God. Many in those circumstances would perhaps be lamenting, but Paul and Silas refused to allow circumstances to determine their attitudes.
- Showed contentment in adversity. In one of his letters that he wrote during his captivity in Rome (Phil. 3:11-13), Paul shows us joy and asks us to show that same joy that salvation brings at all times. This is regardless of the size of the trial we are going through.
- Kept his spiritual freshness. He did not allow trials to undermine his spiritual life. On the contrary, he clung to God and that allowed God's grace to cause Paul to grow in the midst of such hard trials.

For others, pruning can be:

- When God subjects us to discipline to correct us. His discipline is always intended to lead us to an abundant life, not to bring us down or shame us. Hebrews 12:5-6 says: *"And have you completely forgotten this word of encouragement that addresses you as a father addresses his son? It says, 'My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and he chastens everyone he accepts as his son.'"*
- When God does not grant us a promotion at work or does not allow us to take a trip that we desired, etc.
- God can prune us by removing us from companies, friendships, etc. that are hindering us from continuing to grow and bear much fruit.
- Depriving us of something that steals our attention and does not allow us to focus on what God desires from us.
- Something that we go through which helps us to remove negative feelings, such as vanity, prideful living, etc.

D. Biblical principles of pruning

By studying in detail this portion of the Word we can deduce a series of principles of pruning that God performs in those who bear fruit (Conquista Cristiana, 2022).

"He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful." John 15:2

- **Pruning is inevitable for growth.** God prunes us when He sees that we are producing. That is, although it may be painful, it will always result in growth and greater fruitfulness.
- **It reveals God's sovereignty.** He will know the best way to prune us, where to prune us and when to do it.
- **God does not have to explain to us** why He does what He does.
- **We must have discernment to understand when God is pruning us.**
- **Pruning is usually painful.** The purpose is to remove from our life everything that is a hindrance to us producing fruit, although sometimes it is something that we want very much, or at other times it is a trial we must go through.



2.2.4 Third requirement: To love as Jesus loves us

"My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.... This is my command: Love each other." John 15:12-13, 17

Jesus commands us to love in a particular way, according to the way Jesus loved **"as I have loved you"**. This leads us to reflect: What was Jesus' love like?

Let's begin by defining what "love" means. Jesus defined love in verse 13: **"Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends."** It is a love that will lay down its life for others; it is a love that treats **servants** as **friends**.

John Pippet (2010: 31) reminds us that Jesus Christ is the embodiment of God's love. And when He came, He said, *"For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."* (Mark 10:45).

As Edwin Louis Cole (1989) points out, when God's love enters our heart through the Holy Spirit, we know true love. We can love if we surrender our will to God's will, and allow the Holy Spirit to bring God's love into our relationships. Why? Because God transforms us with His love.

2.3 Conclusion

We must remain in Christ. We must remember that, without the Vine, the branch can do nothing. Jesus warned His disciples that if any of them tried to live their Christian life apart from an intimate relationship with Him, they would fail to produce God-honoring fruit.

One evidence that reveals whether a person is genuine in his relationship with God is whether he is studying God's Word and letting that Word influence his life. God wants us to be obedient to His Word.

Remaining in Jesus means that we must depend totally on Him, and not on our own strength, abilities, or our own accomplishments. Remaining in Him will result in transformation through His Holy Spirit. Being a fruitful Christian is something that is done from the inside out.

Meditate on God's desire to prune you. Open your heart to the Spirit and ask Him to prune any part of your life that is not bearing His fruit. Accept the pruning and keep moving forward with what He directs you to do.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application.

1. What does it mean to remain in Christ and why is this necessary? Evaluate what "remaining in Christ" looks like today.

2. What are some ways God prunes us to bear more fruit? If possible, think of ways in addition to the ones shared here.

3. How can we describe the evidence that we are loving as Jesus loves us?

4. Describe how God has pruned you and what has happened as a result. You may also choose to analyze a character in the Bible and see what the result of their pruning was.

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Lesson 3. **Evidence of** *a Fruitful Christian Life*

Biblical Text: *Ephesians 2:10*

"For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

Objective:

- **To describe** some of the main areas in which a Christian can be fruitful.

3.1 Introduction

In the previous lessons we studied that Christ expects us to have a fruitful life and what some of the requirements are for this to occur. Now, we are going to review what it means to "be fruitful". In addition, we are going to study some areas in which a Christian can and should be fruitful.

When a Christian does not do something to show the love of Christ to others, his spiritual life is depleted instead of growing. But God is always giving us opportunities to do good works. Not only does He create circumstances in which we have the opportunity to do good works (starting in the family, then in the church, then with our friends and then in the community where we live), but He also enables us to become more Christ-like every day.

In this lesson we are going to see some examples of fruits or good works that we can do for the glory of God. It is good to identify them so that we do not miss opportunities, so we are clear about what God expects of us and so we can evaluate our growth as Christians.

3.2 Development

3.2.1 Every fruit or good work comes from God

J.I. Packer emphasizes the centrality of grace as an essential part of Christian growth. He points out that we have often misunderstood how it works and have therefore diminished its importance. For this reason, the Church of the Nazarene has changed the paradigm of discipleship, emphasizing the centrality of Grace in the spiritual growth of the Christian.

Grace implies:

1. Lack of moral worthiness of man.
2. God's retributive justice. God, as judge, will give us the corresponding punishment.
3. Man's spiritual importance. There's nothing we can do on our own.
4. God's sovereign freedom: He is free to save us and there is no way to coerce Him.

J.I. Packer (1995:83) reminds us that *"we are, by nature, in a state of total lostness"* without God's grace operating in our lives.

- First, that grace acts preveniently in us even before we seek it.
- Then, it operates in a justifying way when we recognize our sin and accept the saving work of Christ on the cross.
- Grace continues to work in our lives, sanctifying us, and there comes a point where we receive the second work of grace (entire sanctification).
- Grace will work throughout our Christian life and will culminate in our glorification at our resurrection in Christ. (Romans 8:30; 1 Corinthians 15:47-54).

3.2.2 What do we mean by fruitful

If we seek to clarify what is meant by "being fruitful", it may help us to analyze some simple definitions.

- From the Real Academia Española (Royal Spanish Academy /RAE) "fructífero" (fruitful) is an adjective that refers to that which produces a lot of fruit.
- Word Reference tells us that "fructífero" refers to what produces fruit, benefit, or utility: (Word Reference).
- For ABC Definition, the adjective fruitful refers to the benefit of a concrete action that has produced very positive fruits. They cite some examples:
 - Study hours can be fruitful if the students have made good use of the time and progressed in their activities.

- The work in a company has been fruitful when the workers are motivated and have delivered their projects on time.

Now, it is important to emphasize that producing fruit in the Christian life does not mean doing works or doing justice in one's own strength. Rather, it is about intentionally growing in our walk with Christ, allowing the Holy Spirit to transform us, and obeying God in all that He calls us to do (Compelling Truth, n.d.)

3.2.3 Evidence of a Fruitful Life

In the spiritual life there are many areas where the Christian should seek to produce much fruit. Next, we will study some of them.

A. In the personal life

Our purpose is to be like Jesus. According to Paul Polischuk (2021) this is reflected in:

- Expressing traits of His personality (loving, joyful, patient, kind, etc...). In other words, we should reflect the Fruit of the Holy Spirit. Galatians 5:22-23: *"But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law."*
- To behave the same way as Jesus did. (1 John 2:6)
- To adopt the same feeling, the same mind, the same disposition, motivation, attitude that Christ had (Philippians 2:5-8). To be fruitful means to follow Christ. To love what He loves. To do what He commands, having a loving motivation, with a joyful spirit.
- To serve the way Jesus did throughout His life. To do so we must have His same humble disposition. John 13:14-15
- To adopt an attitude of self-control and thus respond to life's offenses, needs, scorn and even persecution. 1 Peter 2:18-21
- To represent Him as His ambassador and servant. 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

We strive to know God and to do the things that please Him, knowing that we can bear no true fruit without Him. John 15:1-12

B. In family life

We emphasize that God has given us the blessing of having a family, either being part of a family that includes our parents or forming a family of our own. It is here that we must begin to put into practice all that Christ demands of us. It is our spouse and our children whom we must begin to love as we love ourselves. Luke. 8:39 *"Return home and tell how much God has done for you." So the man went away and told all over town how much Jesus had done for him."*

It is to our family that we must initiate sharing the good news of salvation. Never give up interceding for your family in prayer. Let no one in your family be left out of the plan of salvation in Christ.

You can also serve in your home. Take the opportunity to teach your loved ones, through your example, how to enjoy harmony when working as a team with the same direction or focus.

Man has been called to be the head of the home. This carries with it the high responsibility of being the priest of his family.



If you put all this into practice at home, when you go out to do your daily activities, you will have the desire that God will put in your heart to put it into practice with those who are around you throughout the day, without exception.

C. In the church

The fruit of His fullness is manifested not only in the individual, but also in the community of faith in which God has placed us.

- When we analyze how the church used to behave, we observe that the transformed lives had a great impact among the members of the church (Acts 2:43-47). This is how God designed His church.
- We can be more fruitful by putting our gifts and talents at the service of building the Kingdom of God (1 Corinthians 12).
- We are also expected in a very special way to be more fruitful by sharing the gospel with others (Matthew 28:18-20).
- We can be more fruitful when we are discipling others.

D. For others

We can start with some of Jesus' main actions and see if we are doing them.

- He shared the good news of salvation.
- He spent time with the disciples, teaching them biblical principles.
- He trained the disciples and others to do the same works that HE did.
- He healed the sick.
- He showed His love by serving others.
- He forgave offenses

We are called to be salt and light to a world in need of Jesus (Matthew 5:13-16)

3.3 Conclusion

When we are connected and intentional in our relationship with God, we produce the fruit that God sows in us. Our goal as Christians is not the fruit we produce, but the connection we have with God. When we focus on our external Christian life, we can get caught up in the appearance.

Let's check then, to see if we are bearing fruit within our families, as a church and among non-Christians. By virtue of this, let us proceed to make the necessary changes to be more fruitful by His grace.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application.

1. What can we do that will help us bear the kind of fruit God expects?

2. Share some evidence of your good fruits (or works) in your local church.

3. Share evidence of good fruits (or works) towards those who are not yet Christians.

4. In what area (family, church, or community) do you feel you are bearing less fruit? What can you do to increase your fruit.

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Lesson 4. **Habits of Grace** *to be More Fruitful*

Biblical Text: Acts 2:41-42

"Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer."

Objectives:

- **To discover** the means of grace that God puts in our hands to be more fruitful.
- **To use** the means of grace to have a more fruitful life.

4.1 Introduction

For John Wesley, the church, having the presence of God, should fill, penetrate, and activate everything. We must fulfill our role of being salt and light, so everything we do must have an impact on our context.

This renewal is focused on the transformation that the Holy Spirit can make in each Christian until they are led to a life of holiness. This should move us to attract unbelievers by sharing out of love, both for their needs and the gospel.

For that transformation, Wesley showed that the "means of grace" are necessary to facilitate Grace to work in them. Prayer, reading, listening to, and meditating on the Word, as well as holy communion and baptism are essential.

Wesley struggled against the traditions of his time, where the "means of grace" had little value. This was due, in part, to the mystical influence that they had to remain still and let God work in their lives. But Wesley made them see that they were separating their love of God from their love of neighbor. For Wesley, it was of utmost importance to remain active in seeking that grace.

Being instituted by God, these "means of grace" are relevant to receiving His grace and help us to grow in love for Him and our neighbor. This brings about our growth in Christlikeness. We cannot disregard them, for it is through them that God gives us His grace. Unfortunately, as the Moravians did in their time, there are people who believe that we should not practice them and remain only in a stillness, waiting for God to work.

4.2 Development

4.2.1 The Means of Grace

John Wesley taught that we cannot earn God's grace. But that does not mean that we should be idle waiting to experience grace without engaging in the means of grace.

John Wesley in his sermon "The Means of Grace" stipulates what the "means of grace" are, and why it is important to work on them. Furthermore, in the sermon he explains how salvation by the grace of Jesus Christ is central and responds to doctrinal objections.

The disciplines - or "means of grace" as he prefers to describe them - are habits that must be cultivated in order to enjoy Jesus. Biblical practices are not goals. That was the error of the Pharisees in Jesus' day and remains the error of legalists today. Rather they are means by which we seek, savor, and enjoy Jesus Christ. Donald S. Whitney

For John Wesley the "means of grace" are ways in which God works invisibly in disciples, quickening, strengthening and confirming their faith, so that the grace of God soaks into the disciples. As we examine the "means of grace" today, we can divide them into two works: works of mercy and works of compassion.

A. Works of mercy

Individual practices: reading, meditating, and studying the Bible, praying, fasting, regularly attending a worship service, living healthily and sharing faith with others.

Communal practices: sharing the sacraments on a regular basis, calling each other to account ("Christian conferences") and group Bible study.

B. Works of compassion

Individual practices: doing good works such as visiting the sick and those in prison, feeding the hungry, and giving generously for the needs of others.

Communal practices: seeking justice, ending oppression and discrimination. For example, John Wesley challenged the Methodists to end slavery. Meeting the needs of the poor.

J. Wesley points out:

"By 'means of grace' I understand the outward signs, words or actions ordained and instituted by God for the purpose of being the ordinary channels by which He may communicate to the human creature His prevenient, justifying, and sanctifying grace."

"I use this expression, 'means of grace,' because I know of none better and because it has been in general use in the Christian church for many centuries. In particular, by our own church, which directs us to bless God 'by the means of grace and the hope of glory'; and teaches us that a sacrament is 'an outward sign of an inward grace, and a means which confers it upon us.'"

The **principal** "means of grace" are: prayer; the study of the Scriptures; and the Lord's Supper. (He then added fasting and "Christian conferences"). We believe, Wesley says, that these "means" were instituted by God as the ordinary channels for communicating His grace.

- 1º Whoever wants to receive God's grace must seek it through "prayer". (Matthew 7:7-11)
- 2º All those who long to receive God's grace must seek it by searching the Holy Scriptures. (John 5:39)
- 3º Everyone who desires to grow in the grace of God, must wait for it by participating in the Lord's Supper. (1 Corinthians 11:23-28)

4.2.2 The Study of the Bible

"Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true."
Acts 17:11

4.2.2.1 Reasons to study the Bible

a) It is a way to talk to God and listen to Him speak.

God speaks through the Holy Scripture, which is the effective and full answer to all the problems and concerns of mankind. Once again, God is the answer.

2 Timothy 3:16 says that all Scripture is "God-breathed". His Word sometimes gives us a warning, a word of encouragement or a lesson for life. It is "His story," lovingly written as God's guide for life, *"so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work."*

Through the words of Jesus in the Scriptures, we can "hear" the heart and voice of God, and know what God is really like. God has spoken and He continues to speak through His written Word.

b) Biblical principles seen as a navigational chart

As in any long journey, in our lives there are different paths, possible shortcuts, etc. It is good to have a map that allows us to identify the best route to reach our destination. However, traditional maps have been left behind and nowadays there are Global Positioning Systems (GPS).

To use a GPS, all you have to do is tell it where you are going and let it know your current location. The system then begins to process information and usually marks the shortest route. As we move forward, if for some reason I get off course, the GPS has the ability to talk to me (literally) and tell me how I can get back on the route to the original destination. Even more, the GPS has the opportunity to warn me of possible problems that I may encounter if I continue on a certain route.

That is what God gave us through His written Word so that we know where to go. But not only that, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, He integrated "voice" as well. So, our recommendation is that as we head towards the heavenly goal, we should always be in the best relationship with God. This will help us to be sensitive to the direction the Holy Spirit wants to give us. Seen in this way, it changes our way of thinking about God's statutes. He is the One who is primarily interested in getting each of us to the goal.

So, I hope you are ready to get back on track and feel motivated to restart your journey to the heavenly goal. If you know and follow those principles that God has for you to undertake the safe journey of being under His care, analyze them and commit to follow them, then expect great things from God in your life.

4.2.2.2 Practical matters about Bible study

a) A daily, weekly, monthly or annual reading goal should be established.

It is good to start with a measurable goal in Bible reading. For example, let's remember that the Bible has 1,189 chapters distributed in 66 books. We could read an average of 23 chapters per week. So if we read between 3 or 4 chapters each day we can read the Bible in a year.

As in any habit, the important thing is to start. It's possible that the first few weeks we will not reach our goal. But we must persist and see the improvement that is achieved each week. It is similar to when a doctor recommends that we exercise by walking an hour a day. We may start by walking 15 to 25 minutes the first few days. Then, the second week we may be able to walk for thirty minutes each day. Possibly in the third week we can already walk 40 minutes a day. And so on, until we are able to walk for an hour every day, according to the established goal.

b) It is very appropriate to begin by reading an introduction to the book to be studied.

Beginning the study of a new book of the Bible by reading an introduction to the book makes it much easier for us to understand what we are going to read. Some thing we may find in an introduction are:

- The author and when it was written.
- What is the purpose it was written.
- A explanation of the context of what was happening at the time the book was written.
- What the main issues to be addressed are.
- Suggestions as to what the main verses are.
- How the book can be divided.

c) Try to agree with others about your readings.

Since Discipleship in Grace is a discipleship that develops in a communitarian way, as Jesus did with the disciples, it will always be of utmost importance that we study the Bible together with other people. This does not mean being together and reading the Bible at the same time, but that is a possibility. What is recommended is that we read the same passages during the week and then share doubts, comments, goals, etc. with each other. There are many options for doing this. Here are some of them:



- Attend a small group and establish an annual reading calendar.
- Share a reading calendar with family members at home who are able to do so. For example, with children, the amount of reading may be less and should be accompanied by age-appropriate explanations.
- Have a group of people with whom you are committed to sharing what you've read.

d) Try to have someone with whom you can discuss your doubts, comments, goals, etc.

It is a great blessing to have a group of people with whom we can discuss doubts, comments, goals, establish new projects, etc. It can be any of the groups mentioned above.

e) Practice what you learn immediately.

One of the most important things in studying the Word is to learn to obey it. Therefore, we should try to put it into practice immediately. There will be times when we can do it easily, but there will also be times when it is more difficult for us to implement God's ordinances. For this, the accompaniment of others in this Discipleship in Grace is of great help.

4.2.3 Example of a Personal Development Plan.

To continue with his spiritual development, a disciple has drawn up the following personal objectives based on the different spiritual disciplines.

Discipline	Activity	Frequency / Time
Read and Meditate on the Word of God	Read the verse of the day and meditate on it.	Daily
	Read at least 25 complete books of the Bible.	Yearly
Prayer	Spend at least 15 minutes in prayer per day.	Daily
	Participate in the 40 Days of Prayer campaign with the congregation you are a part of.	Annually
Study	Continue my studies for my Master's Degree in Family Counseling.	All year long
	Share a missionary study with the brothers and sisters of my congregation.	1 x per month
Retreat	Attend a retreat this year.	Once a year
Personal Journal	Continue my personal spiritual journal, recording God's blessings throughout the year.	Daily
Submission	Obey church leaders, my brothers in Christ, my boss & co-workers, my parents and my spouse.	Daily
Service	Clean the church restrooms	2 x a month
	Serve as a volunteer at Samaritan's Purse events.	4 x a year
Fasting or Abstinence	Abstain from social media for 24 hours.	1 day/week
	Fast one meal in the morning.	1 day/week
Praise and Worship	Spend at least 10 minutes in worship, recognizing God's goodness and characteristics.	Daily
	Go to my local church and participate in congregational worship.	1 day/week
Contemplation	Read a daily devotional from the book "Jesus Calling" and meditate on God's message for my life.	Daily

Discipline	Activity	Frequency / Time
Simplicity	Avoid all kinds of gossip, not repeating what I hear and refusing to participate in conversations that are not edifying.	Daily
	Be punctual, on time, for my commitments.	Daily
Celebration	Participate in the Lord's Supper at church.	1 x per month
	Write in my journal something I am thankful for daily and read my list during our family Thanksgiving dinner.	Daily
Spiritual Direction	Change my vocabulary as I pray to focus on seeking God's direction and not asking according to my own wants or desires.	Daily
	Pray along with our church Servant Board for God to show us His vision for our church.	1 x per week
Mentoring	Spend time with my mentor at least once a month and as needed.	1 x per month
	Become a spiritual mentor to one of the youths in our church or Samaritan's Purse committee. Pray for them and spend quality time with them to help them grow spiritually.	1 x per month
Confession	Practice the discipline of confession during my daily prayer time.	Daily
	Confess my sins to others and ask for forgiveness as the Holy Spirit leads me.	

4.3 Conclusion

It is important to highlight what Wesley mentions *"Moreover, we confess that the use of all 'means' would not be enough to redeem a single sin; that the blood of Jesus Christ alone is sufficient to reconcile the sinner to God, since there is no other propitiation for our sins, no other source that can cleanse iniquity and impurity"*.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application.

1. What are the "means of grace"?

2. Name three reasons to study the Bible.

3. Establish a plan to read your Bible in one year. Determine with whom you will do the study (with your family, with your small group, with a mentor, etc.)

4. Establish a plan to improve your exercise in the "means of grace".

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Lesson 5. *Let's Be More Productive.* **Time Management.**

Biblical Text: *Ephesians 5:15-17*

"Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is."

Objectives:

- **To learn** how to make better use of your time to fulfill God's purpose for our life.

5.1 Introduction

Tim Challies defines productivity in his book 'Do More Better' this way; "Productivity consists of efficiently managing your gifts, talents, time, energy and enthusiasm for the good of others and for the glory of God".

For Gilberto Torrens (2018) "The productive life is a life that seeks to honor God with all that it has." This idea applies to any of us: the professional, the housewife, the student, the retired person, the young person, etc.

G. Torrens (2018) adds "A productive person is someone who takes all the resources they have (regardless of whether they are many or few) and seeks to use them to fulfill the purpose for which they were put on earth. People live a good life, a productive life, only to the extent that they fulfill the purpose for which they were designed."

These concepts highlight that one of the resources at our disposal is time. However, on many occasions we are not aware of its great value. For that reason, sometimes we are not wise in its use to give honor to God in our lives.

So, in this lesson we are going to analyze how people currently use time, how we can use it and what some biblical tips are to make the best use of your time. Undoubtedly, this will allow us to better fulfill the purpose for which God designed us.

5.2 Development

5.2.1 Realities of the current use of time

A) Regarding work

Mexico is the country where people work the most hours per year on average, according to data from the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) with an average of 2,128 hours worked per year (Expansion, 2022).

The Economist, (El Economista, 2022) points out that "More than 8 million people work more than 56 hours a week in Mexico. These long working hours have an impact on three dimensions: physiological, psychological and productivity and performance".

B) Regarding leisure activities

Mexico is the country with the population that has the least amount of free time in Latin America, only 14 hours per week for women and 16 for men, according to the 2013 edition of the study "Social Outlook of Latin America", prepared each year by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

In terms of leisure activities in Mexico, the digital entertainment industry stands out, which has progressively increased since the emergence of the Internet. But it is highlighted that since the pandemic there has been a real and exponential interest (AV451 Editorial Office, 2023). A report by Forbes (2020) states that: In Mexico, people consume 3.2 hours of content daily, while 3 hours are consumed on weekends.

The tendency to spend a large part of time watching television or playing video games is increasing. Germán Ortiz (2023) points out that "most of the people surveyed (69%) stated that they had plans to spend part of their income next month on recreation and entertainment (digital platforms, television, events, sports, movies, video games, streaming, etc.)".

But what do we watch when we watch? Mexicans tend to watch Reality shows; "reality" programs are the new "soap operas" (telenovelas). (Olivares, 2018)

- Reality shows have a rating of 3.81 points.
- Drama shows have a rating of 3 points.
- Soap operas have a rating of 1.91 points.
- Talk shows have 1.73 points.
- Comedy shows have 1.70 points.



The National Council for Culture and the Arts (CONACULTA) conducted a national survey of a sample of people between 12 and 29 years old. It confirmed that watching commercial television continues to be the main activity that consumes our free time (52.9%). The remaining 47.1% of those surveyed spend their free time practicing sports, spending time with family and friends, listening to music on the radio, surfing the Internet, and finally reading. The published results of the survey do not indicate how much time was spent on these activities, but it is almost certain that it is in the afternoons and evenings, varying from 1 to 2 hours a day, as revealed by other research. (El Regional [The Regional], 2015)

Another "pandemic" concerning time misuse is access to social networks. John MacArthur (2016) cites a Time magazine article entitled "It's Time to Tackle Your Facebook Addiction," Kayla Webley shares some alarming statistics:

One-third of women aged 18-34 check their Facebook during the first hour of the morning... 39% of the 1,605 adults surveyed about their social networking habits are 'Facebook addicts'... 57% of women aged 18-34 say they talk to people online more than they talk to people physically... 21% admit they often check their Facebook in the middle of the night.

The pandemic changed our habits significantly. For example, teenagers spent their free time mainly on activities such as listening to music, watching TV, series, videos, social networks and sleeping. These are passive recreational activities with the use of technology. (Medina et al, 2020)

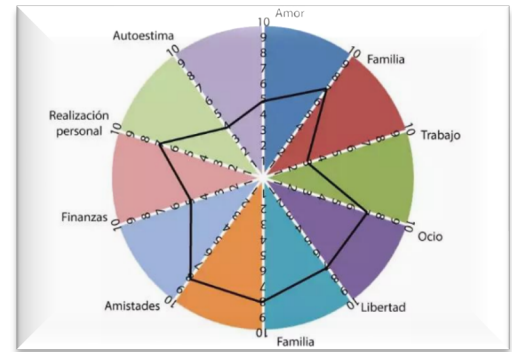
5.2.2 The wheel of life: setting priorities.

Perhaps you have felt this concern. "With so many urgent priorities, it's hard to decide what I should do next." As human beings, we have diverse spheres and roles to play. Thus, we each have the choice of what priority to give to each. Among these roles or areas are: family, partner, work, friendships, profession, spirituality, health, among others.

These activities, when represented in a graph, are perceived as a "wheel of life". To order your priorities, create a map of your most important areas, the objectives for each one and the progress you have achieved. The wheel of life is a circle divided into sections, usually 8 to 12, in which each section represents an area of your life. You have the freedom to choose the areas or roles to play.

To build the wheel you must start by choosing those areas of your life that are important to you. They can be. Spiritual, family, health, work, finances, friendships, leisure or recreation, etc.

Then proceed to analyze how your current state in each of them is. As an example, we will quote Eva Gias' Blog (n.d.) and add some questions that can serve as a guide in some of these areas:



- ***Spirit/Values:*** Do you have spiritual or religious concerns? Do you live and act according to your values? Do you meditate? Do you participate in your religious or spiritual community? ...
- ***Love/Partnership:*** Are you really happy with your current partnership situation? Has marriage or living together turned out the way you thought it would? Does your relationship have a future? Whether you have a partner or not, are you happy with your current situation...?
- ***Family:*** How do you get along with your family members? Do you make the necessary effort to improve your relationship with your family members? Can you go to them whenever you need to?
- ***Work/study:*** Do you like your work? Do you like what you are studying? Do you study what you want? Are you motivated to work or study? Do you feel you are making progress in your work or studies? Does work consume you? Do you make enough effort...?



Then, you can evaluate on a scale of 1 to 10 how satisfied you feel in each area of your life. This will help you identify where you need to work harder.

Some benefits of using the wheel of life. If you decide to make your own wheel of life and self-analyze how fulfilled you feel in each area of your life, you will have the following advantages:

- It quickly identifies areas of your life where you need to put more energy and work.

- It allows you to understand those aspects in which you need to set limits. For example, if you notice that you put a lot of effort into work, but you are neglecting other areas such as family or friends, you will notice an imbalance that needs to be addressed by setting limits.
- It helps to define your goals and priorities more clearly.
- It allows you to establish a path to follow to work on your goals.
- It is easy to interiorize visually.

5.2.3 Biblical advice on time management

What makes a Christian's time management different is the source of what we consider important. That source is God. So a good starting point is to consider how God views time and what He wants us to learn about time management.

Before proceeding to establish your goals, it is important to review some biblical principles that will allow us to plan properly and use our time better, so that we fulfill God's purpose in our life.

Gilberto Torrens (2018) mentions some biblical principles on the use of time that are very useful and allow us to honor God with our life. Let's look at some of them:

1. Learn to prioritize your time.

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well." Matthew 6:33

Your priority must be the Kingdom of God and His righteousness.

"But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things [what we need on a day-to-day basis] will be added to you".

**Your priority
must be the
Kingdom of God
and his
righteousness.**

This tells us that the main focus of our life is to please God. Even in the midst of work, studies and even in our leisure time. This should be reflected in what or how we invest (or spend our time).

It also implies that we must prioritize our activities so that we seek God first. That means leaving time to practice our spiritual disciplines, going to church, being part of a Bible study, getting actively involved in a ministry of the church, etc.

We have talked about the purpose of being Christ-like. To become more like Jesus, we must learn to recognize His priorities and make them ours.

2. Reflect seriously on how you use your time.

"Be wise in the way you act toward outsiders; make the most of every opportunity." Colossians 4:5

The NIV translates it as "Live wisely with those who do not believe in Christ, making the most of every opportune moment."

Let us reflect on the following statement by John MacArthur (2016):

Paul's exhortation has huge implications for how we interact with social media. One day we will stand before Christ and give an account of how we use His resources (including our time and energy). With this in mind, how much time can we justify spending watching and reading Twitter, Facebook, YouTube or similar pages? Remember: just a few hours each day, over a lifetime, is the equivalent of years of lost opportunities.

Now I invite you to do the following exercise. Suppose that for a month you spent an hour each day "just looking at information and comments" on your social networks. What do you imagine might have happened if that time was spent talking about Christ to one person for an hour? Now think what would have happened in a year, five years, etc.

3. When planning your activities, consider the use of your time.

We suggest you make a plan for each of the areas of your life that you have selected.

5.3 Conclusion

To be productive or fruitful people we must be wise in taking advantage of the use of the limited resources we have throughout life. In this sense, one of the most important resources is time. We must make the most of our time to fulfill the purpose that God has for our life.

Sometimes the time available is scarce due to the long days of work or study (sometimes both). We must be aware that the current structure of society imposes long working hours, in addition to offering very low salaries, which sometimes forces us to look for other complementary sources of income and with that we end up consuming the little free time we have.

But we must make a conscious analysis and recognize that on other occasions we have wasted that free time in diversions that do nothing to fulfill our purpose in life. In modern times and with the help of technology, many distractions have emerged, such as the Internet, streaming, digital games, social networks, etc.

We must stop and consider that we will have to give an account to God, because we could have contributed to the edification of the Kingdom of God if we had taken advantage of this time unwisely. Therefore, it is time to reflect on the use we are making of our time and plan the most efficient way to take advantage of it.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application.

1. What do you consider to be leisure time that you can eliminate in order to be more productive? How much time can you save by making these changes each day and each week?

2. Try to use the tool “the Wheel of Life” and estimate how much time is healthy to dedicate to each area of your life: family, ministry, work, friends, health, academic preparation, etc.

3. How could you make better use of your time to be more productive within your family?

4. How could you make better use of your time to be more productive within your ministry?

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Lesson 6 **Winning the** *Inner Battle*

Biblical Text: *Romans 7:15-25*

²¹ "So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me."

Objectives:

- **To seek** entire sanctification in order to overcome our inner struggle.

6.1 Introduction

As Christians we are born again with a "new" nature through the Holy Spirit, yet our "old" sinful nature still struggles for control. The Apostle Paul came to a point in his walk with God where he was totally exhausted due to the intense battle raging deep inside him. But ultimately, Paul's testimony offers us encouragement as we fight the same battle.

In this lesson we will study how to be transformed from the "old man" to be a new creation in Christ.

6.2 Development

6.2.1 Winning the battle within me. Romans 7:15-25

As Christians we are born again with a "new" nature through the Holy Spirit, however, our "old" sinful nature still fights for control. This is why we have so many internal struggles.

The Apostle Paul teaches us how we can come to a point in our walk with God where we are totally exhausted because of the intense battle that rages within us. So, let's read a little about what Paul teaches us and the encouragement he has to offer us as we fight our own battles. Read Romans 7:15-25

Can you hear the despair in Paul's words? Paul is describing to us a human being who is going through an inner spiritual battle. Now, keep in mind that Paul is not a beginner, he is not a new believer. He is a mature believer. He's writing a book that's in the Bible, he's a missionary to the entire Roman Empire, he's probably the strongest Christian who ever lived after Jesus, and yet he's struggling.

Spiritual battles happen when:

1. I try to please God in my own strength:
2. I try to change things in my life from bad to good by simply using my willpower.

Now, if Paul, being a mature Christian had such struggles, it is likely that there is also something in our lives that we are struggling with.

So, as we go through this lesson, I'd like to invite you to think about it. What are you struggling with? What is it that you want to change, but can't seem to? Is it your temperament? An addiction? Your attitude? A secret habit? Unforgiveness? Resentment?

Let's divide this lesson into 3 main sections:

- | | |
|--|----------------|
| a) The cost. | Romans 7:15-21 |
| b) The cause. | Romans 7:21-23 |
| c) The cure. <i>God's battle plan for my victory.</i> | Romans 7:24-25 |

6.2.2 The cost. Romans 7:15-21

Trying to please God and do what is right on your own is exhausting and will eventually wear you down. Fighting the internal spiritual battle with our own power has a price, and it brings emotional consequences.

There are six things that happen when I try to fight the internal spiritual battle that is going on in me with my own power. These are emotional consequences, each leading to the other.

A. Confusion

"I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do." Romans 7:15

Paul cannot understand why he does what he does.

B. Guilt and shame

"And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good."
Romans 7:16

Guilt and shame occur because we know what we are doing is wrong.

C. Compulsions and addictions

"As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me."

Romans 7:17

When you do something so many times, it becomes a habit in your life and then you can't stop doing it. It becomes a compulsion, a habit, an addiction.

D. Self-condemnation

"For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out." Romans 7:18a

Some of us are pros at putting ourselves down, we are pros at condemning ourselves. Paul is putting himself down by saying he is rotten inside. No one told him that, it is his own assumption.

When we begin to condemn ourselves, it is an inevitable sign that we are in a spiritual battle.

E. Frustration

"For I know that good itself does not dwell in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For I do not do the good I want to do, but the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing. Now if I do what I do not want to do, it is no longer I who do it, but it is sin living in me that does it." Romans 7: 18b-20

This is the mark of a Christian who tries to live on his own power, instead of God's power.

Sin is the spiritual counterpart of the physical law of gravity. Gravity pulls you down in the physical realm and sin pulls you down in the spiritual realm.

Let's say I want to ignore the law of gravity and I say, "I'm going to fly, I'm going to be the first human being to fly" so I go out and start flapping my wings (flapping my arms up and down). I can flap as hard as I want, as long as I want, and I will never get off the ground. Because the law of gravity is stronger than my human ability to fly. The same is true in the spiritual realm.

When I try to do the right thing simply by force of will, I'm just flapping my wings. I'm not going to get off the ground. I may get off the ground for a week, two weeks, 3 weeks or even a month, and then I go back to overeating, back to yelling at the kids, back to alcohol, or back to pornography. When I try to change by force of will I get tired very quickly.

You're not going to overcome gravity, and you're not going to overcome sin by yourself, it will cause frustration in your life.

F. Discouragement and despair

"So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me... but I see another law at work in me, waging war against the law of my mind and making me a prisoner of the law of sin at work within me."
Romans 7:21 and 23

In other words, this says, "I feel like giving up. I am in a battle, and I am losing, and I feel hopeless." What do you feel hopeless about in your life?

Next, Paul talks about the cause of the battle.

6.2.3 The cause. Romans 7:21-23

The cause of your inner battle is because: You have two natures! You have your old nature that you were born with, and you have a new nature that was given to you when you accepted Christ, when you were born again and became a believer. This new nature wants to do the right thing, but you still have the old nature within you.

These two natures are in constant conflict with each other, and that is the cause of the battle. Think of a "tug-of-war," there is a rope and people are pulling each end in different directions.

"So I find this law at work: Although I want to do good, evil is right there with me. ... What a wretched man I am!" Romans 7:21 and 24a



The Bible calls this old nature the flesh, the old man. Even though you are a Christian, your old nature is still alive, you are going to live with it for the rest of your life. You don't get rid of your old nature until you go to Heaven. When you became a follower of Christ, He gave you a new nature and the ability to do what is right, but that is at war with "the old you".

Even though I am a believer, I still have my old nature that wants to be proud, that wants to steal, that wants to lie, or that wants to gossip; that old nature is still there.

Now, you might say, "Well, it's just a matter of willpower." The problem is that willpower is not enough to overcome your old nature. Willpower may work for a while, but then you'll get tired and stop flapping. Just because you know what's right doesn't mean you'll do it.

Finally, Paul falls on his face from exhaustion, and tells us God's plan for Victory.

6.2.4 The cure: God's battle plan for my victory. Romans 7:24-25

"Who will free me from this life that is dominated by sin and death? Thank God! The answer is in Jesus Christ our Lord." Romans 7:24b-25a

Paul also gives us the answer to this battle. Notice that the answer is not a principle, it is not a program, it is not a pill, it is not a seminar, it is not a new book, it is not psychology, it is not therapy or philosophy. The answer is a person. The answer is Jesus Christ.

Paul is at the end of his rope, and right where he is, he sees a glimmer of hope. And he gets the answer...he said: "I got it...the answer is in what Jesus did, the answer is Jesus our Lord." The answer is that only God can set you free, through Jesus Christ!

Have you heard the phrase: "Jesus is the answer to all your problems"? It's true. But it's not as simple as that. Although Jesus is the answer to all our problems, we need to know "HOW". How is Jesus the answer to all my problems?

Now that's a very deep topic, but there are some basic things you need to know to start with, to win the battle within you.

1st I must deepen my understanding of Jesus Christ

"Do not let sin control the way you live; do not give in to sinful desires. Do not let any part of your body become an instrument of evil to serve sin. ... Instead, give yourselves completely to God, ... now you have new life."
Romans 6:12-13

Having Jesus in your life is what causes the battle. But having Christ in your life is not enough. He may be a resident, but He wants to be the President of your life.

Jesus doesn't want to just take up space, He wants to be in charge. He wants to be the Lord, the boss, the CEO, the president, the board. He wants you to be UNDER NEW MANAGEMENT.

To make Jesus the Lord of your life, you need to deepen your understanding of Jesus Christ. You need to learn more about Him, and that is done by spending time with Him. Time reading your Bible, time studying the word, time praying, spending time one on one with Jesus, connecting with your small group, coming to church.

The more you know Jesus, the more you become like Jesus, the more you act like Jesus, the more you love like Jesus.

2nd Detect and disarm the lie I am believing.

"If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." 1 John 1:8

You need to understand that the number one way Satan messes up your life is by suggesting lies to you, or getting you to lie to yourself. This is how you ruin your life, by believing those lies.

Every time you expose and challenge a lie you have heard in yourself you will be more liberated. Sin causes us to deceive ourselves.

We all tell ourselves lies all the time. One of the main lies we tell ourselves is when we say, "Oh, it's not really a problem."

What are you pretending isn't a problem in your life? In your marriage? In your habits? What are you lying to yourself about?

Behind every self-destructive act is a lie we've believed. Perhaps you have convinced yourself of something that is not true. We often tell ourselves that things are okay when they are not, and we tell ourselves that things are NOT okay when they are.

To stop beating yourself up, you must stop fooling yourself. You must become a real person and stop denying, stop excusing, stop tolerating, stop minimizing.

What self-destructive behavior are you putting up with in your life? What is the truth you need to admit? You need to admit the truth and the truth will set you free. And who is the truth? Jesus is the truth.

3rd I must admit my struggle to someone.

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.

James 5:16

Notice the verse says confess your sin not to God, it says confess to one another, and pray for one another. If you are struggling with your speech, your behavior, your secret addiction, the Bible says we need to share it.

If all you want to do is be forgiven, just admit it to God, but if you want to change, to be healed, to be different, God says you're going to have to admit it to somebody else.

You don't have to admit it to everybody, all you need is one person who will love you unconditionally, accept it, pray for you and be your accountability partner.

No one goes to war alone, to fight alone. You go with a team. You need a battle partner. You need a person in your life with whom you are honest and forthright.

You need tell them, "I'm struggling with this . . ." and by doing that the relief valve opens, the pressure goes away.

"So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh." Galatians 5:16

6.3 Conclusion

God has given you a new nature and everything you need to live a victorious life, but it is worth nothing if you don't have the Holy Spirit empowering you to live it out.

If you are trying to win your spiritual battle on willpower alone, you are just flapping your wings.

All your good intentions will never be enough, you can't stop drinking, lying, being violent, controlling your instincts, watching porn... on you own. The only way to win the battle against the old nature is to let the Holy Spirit sanctify you. You can't live the Christian life on your own strength.

I don't know what you're dealing with today. I know my own struggles, and I also know that I'm tired of trying to change on my own.

Are you ready to surrender everything to Jesus, are you ready to deepen your understanding of Him, are you ready to disarm the lies of the enemy in your life and confess your struggle to someone?

Let's pray and ask the Holy Spirit to empower us....

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application.

1. Why do some Christians still live in the flesh?

2. What are the areas that the enemy can still defeat you (or has been defeating you to date)? What steps should a Christian who is still defeated by the flesh take?

3. How can a Christian be sanctified by the Holy Spirit?

4. How can the church or other disciples help a Christian to become sanctified by the Holy Spirit?

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Lesson 7. **Transforming Grace I**

Biblical Text: 2 Corinthians 3:18

*"And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory,
are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory,
which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit."*

Objectives:

- **To understand** how we are transformed into the image of Christ.
- **To seek**, day by day, the Holy Spirit to work in us to transform us into the image of Christ.

7.1 Introduction

There is a Spanish song whose chorus says: "I want to be more like you, to see life like you, to saturate myself with your Spirit and to reflect your love to the world". We know that our purpose is to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. But how does this happen?

Dallas Willard, in his book "Renovation of the Heart: Putting on the Character of Christ", tells us about spiritual transformation, which Mr. Willard defines as the renovation of the heart. This is a process guided by the Holy Spirit by which the inner world of the person is formed in such a way that it becomes the inner being of Christ himself.

As we are spiritually formed in Christ, our external life becomes an expression of the character and teachings of Jesus. The center of Christian formation is Jesus, and the goal is conformity to Him, which arises from an inner transformation as we interact with the grace of God.

In this lesson and the next we will study each of the dimensions of human nature, and the positive condition of each of them within the process of spiritual formation.

7.2 Development

7.2.1 The Heart in the System of Human Life

The heart, will, or human spirit is the center of human life. The heart is the place where the decisions of the whole person are made. This is its function. Looking closely at the whole human being, we find six essential aspects in our lives that interact:

- the mind (thoughts and feelings),
- the will,
- the body,
- the social context and
- the soul.

If the six dimensions are aligned with God and with what is good, our actions will bear good fruit. But if these dimensions are not aligned with God, we will bear bad fruit.

7.2.2 Essential evil in the fallen soul

Dallas Willard (2004) tells us that it is essential for us to remember that there is a great dysfunctionality and malformation of the mind, feelings, body and social relationships because of sin. The real source of our failures lies in our choices.

The problem is that we do not fear God. When we begin to fear acting in opposition to God, then we can begin to be wise. When we exclude God from the heart and soul, the intellect becomes dysfunctional and tries to devise the alternative "truth" that man is God, but that only leads to chaos.

The drive towards self-gratification opens the door to a life without limits, this happens when man runs away from God. Therefore, a lost person is one who mistakes himself for God, and who believes he can control his life.

7.2.3 Radical excellence restored to the soul.

Restoration is the reordering of the six dimensions of the human being subordinated to God. For this, there are certain basic aspects.

- We start with self-denial; it is about losing our devastated life.
- We also have to lose our life in order to find it again, that is to say, to renounce our desires as something primordial, exchanging them for God's projects.

- And finally, we have to take up the cross, that is, to divest ourselves of our desires and ourselves. The cross that we must take up is placed above every obsessive and unbalanced desire so that the broad scope of agape love can shape in us a complete and eternal life for God and mankind. It is necessary that we put to death the "I".

7.2.4 Spiritual change

Jesus came to teach us that true change is possible, that we do not have to live life without hope, in lovelessness, or in fear. He understood the greatness of God and operated accordingly. We have hope! We can be different if we allow Christ to take control of our lives and begin to change our human dimensions.

- If we want to take care of our own spiritual formation or that of others, the vision of the kingdom is the essential starting point. The kingdom of God is the sphere of God's effective will, the place where God's will will be done.

If we want to take care of our own spiritual formation or that of others, the vision of the kingdom is the essential starting point.

- Second, we resolve to live in the kingdom of God by resolving to obey the example and teachings of Jesus. This is how we put our trust in Him. No one can really believe the truth about Jesus without trusting Him by determining to obey Him.
- Next, the vision and the solid intention to obey Christ will naturally lead to seek and apply the appropriate means for such an objective. Here, the means in question are means for spiritual transformation, for the replacement of the "lost" inner character with the inner character of Jesus: His vision, understanding, feelings, decisions, and character.

The means to this end are not all directly under my control since some of them are God's actions toward me and in me. However, some are. These consist of things that can be done with God's help in every dimension of our life and being to renew the human heart and progressively shape the hidden, inner world of the person.

7.2.5 Transformation of the mind: thoughts

Everything begins when we assimilate the thought that God exists, that He loves us and that He cares for us, it is then that we can begin to align our will with Him. It is necessary to put before our mind the Word of God, meditate on it, ponder its meaning, explore its implications, especially the way it affects our own lives.

To serve God properly we must think in an upright and honest way. When Scripture settles into a mind that thinks rightly under the guidance and enablement of the Holy Spirit, that person is on the path of spiritual formation. Thoughts are directly related to the vision of spiritual formation; without it nothing changes. Unless the vision is perceived in a proper way, the intention that will be formed will be wrong (or non-existent) and the means that will be put into practice will be chaotic and ineffective.

Special dangers of the mind are:

- Pride and overconfidence in certain ideas, which becomes pride of doctrine, practice, and tradition, falling into legalism and arrogance.
- Another danger is ignorance of the facts. If we want to use our minds correctly, we must live with an open attitude and with a constant desire to learn, without jumping to conclusions on any serious matter.
- A third important danger in the mental life of the disciple is to allow our desires to guide our thoughts; especially the desire to prove ourselves right. This usually goes hand in hand with a sense of intellectual superiority and is often related to the desire to receive the approval of others.
- A fourth major danger has to do with the images we accept in our minds. These may be images of intellectual authority, or images of economic well-being, or images of the macabre and the horrible, or images of power (dominance) and sexuality, and so on.

7.2.6 Transformation of the mind: feelings

Feeling encompasses a whole range of things that are felt: in particular, sensations, desires, and emotions. Today, feelings are appealed to because they are considered to be the most vital, the innermost thing in man. Understanding the role of feelings in life and in the process of spiritual formation is essential.



Feelings, more than any other component of our nature, are the trigger for sinful acts. To be guided by feelings is to allow oneself to be led by that which we are not capable of leading.

The human being is not responsible for his emotions and instinctive impulses and for feeling them, because they arise automatically from his unconscious, but he is responsible for what he decides and does with them. The human being has the unusual capacity to use them "adequately" for life and social good, or for the destruction of himself or others.

The feelings that are related to love, joy and peace are those that must characterize a life transformed by Christ. The danger of feelings arises when we confuse the state with the feeling that accompanies it, for example, the state of peace is accompanied by the feeling of tranquility. With regard to our spiritual formation, we have to make the decision to act with the state in mind, good or bad, and let the feelings arise as a by-product, as they undoubtedly will.

7.3 Conclusion

As human beings we have various dimensions such as: the mind (thoughts and feelings), the will, the body, the social context and the soul. Coming to Christ and accepting Him as Savior and Lord begins a transforming work in us. This transformation must positively affect each of the dimensions mentioned above.

If we neglect any of these dimensions, our transformation will be affected in such a way that it will negatively impact our spiritual growth into Christlikeness. Therefore, we must ensure that our transformation is complete and allows us to reflect Christ.

We particularly studied that the transformation of the mind in terms of thoughts requires the spiritual disciplines to know more of Christ and seek to align our thoughts to His will. As we do this, God will be working in us by giving us His grace so that there will be a transformation in our heart.

The same happens with our feelings. These are derived from the emotions and thoughts we associate with certain circumstances. Whereas emotion is a set of neurochemical and hormonal responses that predispose us to react in a certain way to an external stimulus. Our responsibility is to properly manage our emotions and thoughts to prevent negative feelings such as bitterness, envy, jealousy, etc. from forming. God's role through His Holy Spirit is to help us, to work within us, to bring about a transformation that will help us to develop the Fruit of the Spirit.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application.

1. Why is it important that the mind (thoughts and feelings), the will, the body, the social context and the soul are aligned in order to be able to bear fruit?

2. It is mentioned that to have a spiritual change it is important to have the Kingdom of God as a starting point. Why do you think this is so?

3. How do you explain the process of transformation of the mind in terms of thoughts? What are the special dangers of the mind?

4. How do you explain the process of transformation of the mind in terms of feelings? What is the relationship between emotions and feelings?

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Lesson 8 **Transforming Grace II**

Biblical Text: Ephesians 4:22-24

"You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness."

Objectives:

- **To understand** how we are transformed into the image of Christ.
- **To seek**, day by day, the Holy Spirit to work in us to transform us into the image of Christ.

8.1 Introduction

In the previous lesson we began to study each of the six dimensions of human nature, and the positive condition of each one of them within the process of spiritual formation. We already studied the transformation of the mind with regard to thoughts and emotions.

In this lesson we are going to study how to facilitate the process of transformation regarding the will, the body, the social context and the soul.

8.2 Development

8.2.1 Being transformed into the image of Christ

Facundo Vanni (2016) points out that:

We must change our heart, seeking to be more and more like Jesus, who is God himself, every day. Our heart is corrupt (Matthew 15:18-20). As we are transformed by God into the glorious image of Jesus, we are being renewed, new people who abandon their own way of living, their ego, and surrender to the feet of Jesus Christ, learning and living his teachings, sharing the riches of his glory.

Pablo Polischuk (2016), analyzing what John Stott in his work "The Radical Disciple" establishes, synthesizes how the process of transformation to the image of Christ takes place:

1. "The process of becoming like Christ demands:
 - a) A surrender of our being to God, as a living sacrifice, holy, pleasing to God;
 - b) Not to allow ourselves to be conformed or molded to the currents of this age;
 - c) To be transformed in his being;
 - d) By the renewing of our mind (Romans 12:1-2)

In the likeness of John the Baptist's posture, He must grow (intrude and affect the cognitive, emotional, motivational and behavioral processes of the inner being), and the self of the being must diminish, giving place to the claims of Jesus Christ in his life (John 3:30), causing the human will to be bent, subject and surrendered to the will of God.

2. The process of becoming like Jesus Christ is empowered by the actualization of the potential to experience freedom from sin as a result of considering the self as 'dead to sin, but alive to God' in Jesus (Romans 6:11). Actualizing the fact that, by being identified with Christ in His death, and regarding oneself as not subject to bondage but free from the power of sin (Romans 6:1-14)."

Next, we will continue to explore the areas of transformation that Dallas Willard (2004) points out.

8.2.2 Transformation of will and personality

Our personality is the overall, internal structure of the self that reveals itself in our long-term patterns of behavior and from which our actions arise more or less automatically. Will represents the capacity to originate or refrain from originating something: an action or a thing. It makes certain things exist.

Our will alone cannot bring about change. However, the exercise of the will together with the change of our thoughts and feelings can make us the kind of person who acts in a better way.

The transformed Christ-like will has a single purpose and expresses a joyful devotion to God and His will, to what He wants for us, together with a desire to serve both Him and our fellow men out of love for Him. This is the result of Christian spiritual formation that concerns the will, heart, or spirit.

The characteristic feature of the will apart from God is duplicity (fragmentation and multiplicity). The will wants many things that cannot be reconciled with each other. The heart (will, spirit) is the object of God's attention in the human being, as well as his interlocutor. He addresses the heart because it represents who we truly are, who we decide and have decided to be. What God wants from us can only be derived from the heart. He respects the centrality of our will and will never cancel it out; He desires to form a godly character in and for us, in order to fulfill the eternal destiny He has purposed for us.

To truly become someone who, above all else, wants to act in accordance with the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matthew 6:33) is something that does not happen overnight. However, by way of clear purpose, decisiveness, proper spiritual disciplines and the Grace that enlightens and corrects us when we fail, this goal is not as far away as many suppose. The doublemindedness, confusion and evil purposes that infect our will can be clarified and eliminated as we set our eyes on Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of our faith.

8.2.3 Transformation of the body

The spiritual transformation in the likeness of Christ is an interior process, which must be reflected externally in the same way. The transformation of the body occurs when we progressively acquire a disposition to do good and avoid evil in relation to our body. The transformation of the body, then, becomes important because it is an external reflection of an inner change. In other words, it is the most visible testimony of spiritual formation.

The body can come to be considered the main obstacle to attaining spiritual formation, due to the human tendency for the things of the flesh. The body is the main source of gratification. Therefore, focusing on or yielding to the desires of the body is equivalent to spiritual death.

The body is the essential sphere of our dominion and responsibility. Of the physical world, only the body represents who we are, and this is essential to our identity. Through the body we gain a family, a gender, a nationality, and so on. The body is also the "outlet" for our emotions, feelings, thoughts and character, and they are revealed through our body language. It also determines how we interact with others. Knowing this, we can highlight the importance of Christ Himself coming in the flesh, to teach us that it is possible to master the body.

Paul invites us to put to death every earthly or carnal desire in us, referring to all those sins where the body follows its carnal tendency. If we are under grace, sin should no longer control us, and with God's help we can overcome that inclination.

In the words of Dallas Willard (2004), "The proper reeducation and care of the body is absolutely essential to attain Christlikeness". The transformation of the body goes beyond how we dress, what we eat, or whether we workout. It includes the sexualization of almost everything, abortion, eating disorders, racial and other forms of discrimination.

**Dallas Willard (2004),
"The proper reeducation
and care of the body is
absolutely essential to
attain Christlikeness."**

Nowadays, we hear people say "my body, my choice," but nothing could be further from the truth. This phrase only denotes that we have not understood that our body is not ours, it was made by God, and on top of that it was bought by God through the death of His Son, so it does not belong to us.

Therefore, what we must do is described in Romans 12:1, and that is to present our body as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God. The author describes this as "the total surrender to God of each of the members of our body until the very tissues and muscles that make it up are inclined toward Him and toward the life that pleases Him; until all of them are strengthened by heavenly powers for action, break all conformity to the life of this world and transform us according to the reality of the world to come, developing the renewal of our understanding."

Some ways in which this area of spiritual formation can be implemented in my local discipleship ministry might be:



- Encourage a "fast" or abstinence by separating ourselves from technology for a few hours, for a day, or for several days. This will help us master our desire to be glued to the cell phone or look at social media.
- Participate in a work and witness project where we use our physical body to help others in need, either by building, or sharing food.
- Carry out, with a discipleship group, The Daniel Plan in which only natural foods are eaten and sugars and processed foods are eliminated.

8.2.4 Transformation of the Social Dimension

The nature of the poison of sin in our social dimension takes two forms, and both are so closely related to each other that, in reality, they are two formations of a single thing: **lack of love, lack of proper concern and care for others.**

These two forms of sin we may call assault or attack and withdrawal or distancing. They are such a normal part of human existence that most people believe they are simply "reality" and cannot be lived without. Assault occurs when we act in ways that are contrary to what is good for a person. We withdraw or distance ourselves when we regard their well-being as indifferent to us.

It is important that we identify and eliminate these attitudes in all our relationships, but especially in our family and our closest relationships.

Spiritual formation is profoundly social. It is not possible to keep it to oneself. Everything that happens between God and me affects who I am; and this, in turn, modifies my relationship with all those around me. Besides, my relationship with others also transforms me and profoundly affects my relationship with God. Hence, these relationships must be transformed so that I can be transformed as well. Elements present in the transformed social dimension include: individuals coming to see themselves restored, as God himself sees them; the abandonment of all defensiveness; the elimination of all pretense and in its place, genuine love and openness to the redemption of our wider social circle.

8.2.5 Transformation of the soul

In the life of those whose heart is well guarded; the soul will be properly ordered under God's authority and in harmony with reality. The result of this state will be a person who is prepared and able to respond to life's situations in a good and upright manner. The spirit of this person will be in a right relationship with God and, with the help of God's Grace, will lead the soul to subject itself to Him, and subject the mind (thoughts and feelings) to the soul. The social context and the body will then become subject to the thoughts and feelings that will be in line with the truth and with God's purposes for us. Of all the dimensions of the human being that play a role in understanding spiritual formation, the soul is by far the most controversial and inaccessible in today's world.

The transformation of our soul requires that we recognize its reality and importance, understand the biblical teachings in this regard and assimilate them within the framework of the yoke of Jesus, which teaches us humility and abandonment to God.

This is what brings rest to the soul, which is thus revitalized in goodness by receiving the law and Scripture as the structure of our covenanted communion with God in Grace. The law is the structure of the Grace-filled life in the kingdom of God.

In some cases, other things may be necessary for soul recovery: perhaps some special acts of deliverance or ministries of inner healing or psychological counseling. In any case, the good news of Jesus is always presupposed. However, the most powerful force for the transformation of the soul born from above is to walk in the righteousness that generates and sustains Grace.

8.3 Conclusion

The character of the person evolves over time: it is developed during childhood and is firmly manifested during adolescence. Character can vary due to impacts and events that strongly mark us during life. Character is acquired through life experiences, which modify the biological tendencies and predispositions of temperament (which is more hereditary). Between temperament and character, personality is formed. With proper discipline, knowledge of Jesus and with the help of the Holy Spirit, the character is shaped to the likeness of Christ.

It is also of utmost importance to have dominion over the body, to avoid falling into the desires of the flesh and to carry out the will of God.

On the other hand, there must be a transformation of social commitment. John Wesley relates this to relational holiness which is showing love in action by responding to the needs of the people around us.

Finally, we learned that a person with a transformed soul (Romans 12:2) is prepared and able to respond to life's situations in a good and right way. His spirit will be in a right relationship with God and, with the help of His grace, will lead the soul to submit to Him, and the mind (thoughts and feelings) to submit to the soul. The social context and the body will be subject to the thoughts and feelings that will be in line with God's purposes for us.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application.

1. How is our character formed? How do spiritual disciplines help us to be transformed in character?

2. In what ways can the body be transformed? What actions facilitate the transformation of the body?

3. In what ways can the social dimension be transformed? What would be some evidence of our social transformation?

4. In what way can the soul be transformed? What would be some evidence that our soul has been transformed?

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Lesson 9. **The Love of God is Reflected** *in the Love of Neighbor*

Biblical Text: Ephesians 5:2

"...and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God."

Objectives:

- **To understand** that a Christian life is based on loving God and those around us, without exception.
- **To practice** loving one's neighbor.

9.1 Introduction

We live in a society where good, and evil coexist. There are many things that social structures have been building, seeking the good of a few. Sometimes as Christians we feel overwhelmed because we are unable to do more for the unprotected, the exploited, the marginalized, etc.

However, we should not give up, we should meditate on the model that Jesus left us during His earthly ministry. In order to better understand how we can be more and more like Jesus, we must study the way in which God operates in our lives through His grace, love and justice.

9.2 Development

9.2.1 Grace

The simplest definition of grace is a gift (Romans 8:35-39). God did not love us based on our good behavior or any merit we might have. You are loved just as you are, not depending on what you do or how you behave, or whether you deserve it. "God is love."

David Busic (2020) reminds us that grace is personal because it comes to each person according to their need or ability to receive it. It is the gift that manifests itself through the restoration of friendship with God. Saul had to learn the same thing on the road to Damascus, and God transformed the zealous law-abider through his encounter with Jesus. (Acts 9:1-19).

Each person receives and appropriates grace in a unique way because we experience grace in a personal relationship with the triune God, which is given to us by the Father, extended through Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit. Grace is experienced in multifaceted, subtle, and diverse ways.

Grace is expensive (John 3:16). Although grace is free to us, it does not mean that it does not have a price. It cost God the life of His Son, and our response must be to turn our lives back to God.

Now, we must meditate on the following. First, we need to know what grace means. It is great to know that God loves us, but what difference does it make in my life?

It is striking how Wesley took very seriously the love of neighbor that the church takes as something extra - something that is done after God's love has been declared and celebrated in worship. Wesley radically changed the order of things when he included "works of mercy" - traditionally understood as good works for the benefit of the neighbor - in the list of means of grace. This is one of the most notorious features of his theology; Wesley mentioned that he was well aware that 'this is not something that is commonly advertised.' (Rieger in Grace Under Pressure: 46)

Wesley took this statement as a guide to faith to such an extent that when faced with the dilemma of performing a work of piety or a work of mercy, those of mercy must be preferred. We quote again from Sermon 92:

Thus, he should show his zeal for works of piety; but much more for works of mercy; for God will have 'mercy and not sacrifice,' that is, rather than sacrifice. Therefore, whenever the one interferes with the other, works of mercy are to be preferred. Even reading, hearing, and praying should be omitted or postponed 'to the omnipotent call of charity,' when we are called to relieve the distress of our neighbor, whether in body or soul.

In Wesley's own words from his writing "Counsels to the Methodist People", we read:

If you follow this principle, by continually endeavoring to know, love, resemble, and obey the great God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ as a God of love and forgiving mercy; if on this principle of love and obedient faith, you carefully abstain from all evil, and labor as you have opportunity, in doing good to your fellow men, whether friends or enemies; and if, finally, you unite to encourage and help one another, thus forging your salvation, and to that end lovingly watch over one another, you are what I call Methodists.

9.2.2 Jesus' Model of Love

There are many ways in which we can see God's love for us. Remembering some of them will be important to see how we can show that we love others. Let us review this list, which is by no means exhaustive:

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 as He was on the cross, He thought of His mother and left her in John's hands. What kind of care are we providing for our family?
4. He did not show favoritism. Are we "selective" in who we love? What has been your criteria for deciding who to love and who not to love? Can you make a list of those whom the enemy has "blocked" you from loving?
5. He forgave our sins, how grateful are we for that? What are we doing as a consequence of our gratitude? And, on the other hand, have we learned to forgive others? Do we bring the sinner closer to the feet of Christ?
6. He loves children. How much do you enjoy children? Do you love them all, or do you find only those in your family "adorable"? What can we do for the most disadvantaged children?
7. He never left the disciples alone. He promises to be with us always. Could we be Jesus' hands and arms to make the needy see that Jesus doesn't leave them either?
8. Jesus came to find us because we were lost in sin. Are we aware that, if it had not been for Jesus' sacrifice, we would be condemned to death because of our sin? Are we sharing with others the plan of salvation in Christ?
9. Jesus always took special care of those in need. On a daily basis, who are the people in need around us? What have we been doing for them? Are we serving them in such a way that they can see God's love through our lives?
10. Out of love for the Father, Jesus obeyed even to the point of death on a cross. Have we been obedient to the Father? How are we loving others? Have we shared the message of salvation with people who do not yet have Him as their personal Savior?

Do you realize how much Jesus loves us? Jesus asks us to love Him and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves (Mark 12:29-31).

9.2.3 The kind of love that God demands of us

Agape love is the kind of love which represents God's divine love. It is an enriching, perfect, absolute, sacrificial, and pure love that God gives us. John 3:16 summarizes this love. In 1 John 4:10, the apostle also refers to this kind of love. Paul describes it in Romans 5:8 when he speaks of Jesus going to the cross out of love for us.

Based on 1 Corinthians 13:4-8 we will describe just a few characteristics of agape love in brief. In the following lessons we will go deeper into some of them:

1. ***It is kind.*** It is inclined to do good. It is also associated with being kind to other people. By enjoying doing good, a person will seek to meet the needs of others. In other words, he seeks to be helpful.
2. ***It is not proud.*** It is about a simple person, humble in spirit. That is to say, he does not attribute to himself what he has obtained. On the contrary, he recognizes that it is God who allows us to achieve something. He also knows how to give credit to others for the achievement they've obtained. The one who is proud, in the negative connotation given here, is the person who has an excess of self-esteem and becomes arrogant. We must be careful not to be proud, for that would distance us from God and from our neighbors.
3. ***It is not rude.*** This refers to being kind to other people. For example, you can treat your wife well, which will make both of you feel good. This will improve the relationship. Other versions translate it as not dishonoring others. That is, you will be careful not to offend, humiliate or mistreat the other person.
4. ***It is not self-seeking.*** This means the person does not put his own needs or desires first, but he is aware of the needs of others.
5. ***It does not keep record of wrongs.*** This speaks clearly that the person who loves enjoys being fair in his dealings with others.



6. ***It enjoys the truth.*** That is, the person will avoid establishing a relationship based on lies.
7. ***It protects, trusts, hopes.*** It tells us about a person who has tolerance for other people.

How do we achieve such a love? We can observe that the standards that we see in this writing of the Apostle Paul have characteristics “similar” to the love that God professes to us, keeping all proportion. In a way, agape love is also the demand for us. But it is of utmost importance to make it clear that human effort is not enough to achieve it.

This is the standard of love that God asks of us as Christians. Therefore, He has given us the means to achieve it, which is His Spirit. From this we must develop the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-24). In order to develop the fruit of the Spirit in our lives, we must first die to sin. We must leave the old carnal man behind. This is only possible if we ask the Father to fill us with His Holy Spirit (Romans 6:22).

As we “die” to the old man, we will have better thoughts, express better words, perform better actions and thus become more just and holy (2 Peter 1:3-9).

9.2.4 God's grace, love, and justice

Being aware that God loved us first, gave us His grace and transforms us through His Holy Spirit, it is our duty to be attentive to what He expects of us.

God expects us to be able to recognize the value of each person, for Christ has offered His life for each one. He does not want anyone to be lost. So as Mott (1995:39) points out, God's love describes both God's action and our own response to that love.

It further teaches us that He is a God of justice. Consequently, He expects our love to respect and promote His justice on all fronts, especially for the unprotected. As Charles Mott (1995:52) points out, human rights are indeed established by God. Every Christian must respond to them and be respectful and seek not only to fulfill, but to have others fulfill those rights as persons created by God, He has given those rights to them.

9.3 Conclusion

As Mott (1995: 37) points out, God's grace should affect our attitudes toward the weak, oppressed, and needy. His love should move us to do good to everyone within our reach. The presence of His Holy Spirit on a continuous basis should move the Christian to love his neighbor, which includes not only those in need, but even our enemies.

God's love in our lives does not allow us to remain indifferent in the face of social injustice, abuse, exploitation, etc. Our actions in response must be both personal and communal. Personally, we must be moved by God's love and justice and respond to the continuous grace that God gives us every day.

In addition, as a Church we must have more presence in the laws that govern workers. We must seek individually and as a community to bring help to those people who try to emigrate (in most cases) not with the desire to make wealth, but to subsist with their families.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application.

1. What can we say about a Christian who does not show concrete actions of love for others?

2. What is evidence of your love for your family and others?

3. How can we achieve a Christ-like love for others?

4. What are some actions of love for others that can be established by the Men's Ministry in our church?

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Lesson 10. **Works of Grace and** *The Mission*

Biblical Text: Matthew 10:8

*"Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy,
drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give."*

Objective:

- **To create** a plan to do "works of mercy" in order to show the love that dwells within a person and each person to know Jesus as Savior and Lord.

10.1 Introduction

When we analyze the real situation of the church in some Districts in the light of the Great Commission, we will find that there are serious problems with the fulfillment of the Great Commission. The growth of church membership, on average, has been very slow in the last ten years within the Region. There are several factors that could explain this, but we must recognize that in some cases we are far from the image that Jesus designed for the church.

In this lesson we are going to analyze what the image of the Church according to Jesus Christ is, how well we fulfill it today on our Region, how we can get closer to the image that Jesus had for His church, and thus fulfill the Great Commission more effectively?

10.2 Development

Wayne Cordeiro (2012) presents **twelve practical steps** to becoming a healthy church, including the following:

1. Ways to foster love for the community,
2. Developing a culture of service,
3. Converting visitors into regular attendees and much more.
4. Promoting healthy relationships and connecting everything with a soul,
5. Becoming a vibrant church that is irresistible to God and to people.

John Wesley considered the obligation to alleviating the needs of people as part of the Christian mission, considering it a sign of divine salvation. These works should be a reflection of God's love and in obedience to what God asks of us (the ethic of love). Once a person becomes a believer in Christ, he should abide by the following:

- Do no harm to anyone; do good to all; and comply with God's ordinances (works of piety).
- In addition to this, as a second evidence, every Methodist person was to take an interest in both the physical and spiritual needs of all people (works of mercy).

For Wesley, practicing the individual Works of Mercy (Means of Grace), such as prayer and devotion, studying the Scriptures, devotional reading, and "practicing the presence of God" will lead the individual to perform the Works of Mercy (also Means of Grace), such as caring for the sick, feeding the hungry, and ministering to the needs of others in general. This is the "inhale" and "exhale" of the spiritual life, so to speak.

10.2.1 The Early Church and the Works of Mercy

Biblical and historical examples of how to apply oneself to the mission of the church.

If we review the actions of our Lord Jesus, we can see that He always cared for the most marginalized in a special way. The ministry of the Lord Jesus was characterized by:

- Giving importance to women, revaluing them according to God's original plan.
- He gave special treatment to children, making them see the special role they have in the Kingdom of God.
- He was close to the poor and the needy.
- He cared for the health of the sick.
- He gave comfort to those who were despised by society.

With this we see that Jesus always attended to the needs of the human being in an integral way: spiritual, emotional, physical, etc. But He also denounced the false teachers, the religious leaders who only looked after their own interests.

To rescue the lost is God's mission and therefore the church's mission. The Bible teaches us that God has always seen people with greater needs in a special way. Here are some biblical examples:

- 1 Kings 17:10-24 describes the widow who feeds the prophet Elijah by giving him everything she had and God made sure that there was no lack of flour in her jar or oil in her pot.
- Psalm 68:5-6 which tells us that God is Father of orphans and defender of widows. The book of Proverbs teaches us about God's concern for the poor (Proverbs 10:4).
- Proverbs 10:3 tells us: The LORD will not let the righteous go hungry.
- James 1:27 tells us that religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after the orphans and widows in their distress, and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.
- Jesus teaches us in Mark 9:33-37 that to receive children is to receive Him.

Unfortunately, there are people, even within the church, who do not care for the poor or the marginalized, arguing that Jesus said that there will always be poor people (John 12:8). Then they say: why should we care for them.

The **early church** itself gave evidence of having learned from the model of Christ and began to sympathize with the needs of others, in such a way that it found grace before the people (Acts 2:42-47). Here we see that they persevered in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers.

10.2.2 John Wesley and the works of mercy

For Wesley, the love of God in Christ must be a visible, palpable, experienced in the relationships of each of the congregations. For Wesley, submission to the experience of the witness of the Holy Spirit must be sought. Associated with this arises a new community of experience in which persons who have received the grace and love of God show their love for others, thus bearing witness to what God has done in their lives.

The Methodists in their time reached out to the poor, to the imprisoned, to the marginalized. They fought against slavery, prostitution, and many social evils of their time.

In their purpose of reaching out to the poor, they worked together to meet various needs. Among them was the creation of schools to teach children to read and write, to provide medical care and above all, to show love. They gave the poor a voice, especially in meetings regarding social class. The poor were given back their value as people created by God and that they had rights like any other human being, among those rights was the right not to live in slavery. Because of their efforts, their society experienced a new stage that went beyond the spiritual, embracing aspects such as the social and psychological. In this environment, God brought His revival to England.

This has great implications for our pastoral work, since it shows us that even in the midst of a contemporary post-modern society, which among its features tends to be individualistic, the works of piety and mercy are the right way to be salt and light in today's society. If the "means of grace" are not translated into "works of mercy" that reach people for Christ, those works will have been in vain, because of their misuse. The use of small groups will be relevant to reaching our society.

10.2.3 The Church of the Nazarene, heir of this tradition

From its beginnings, the Church of the Nazarene has sought to contribute to the development of the community where it ministers. It has done so by taking up the Wesleyan heritage, launching major projects, such as:

- The establishment of hospitals.
- The establishment of schools at various educational levels.
- Encouraging schooling and advancement of children in their schools through camps, workshops and various activities.
- Childcare services.



- Support for the needy through food supplies, medical consultations, etc.
- Medical brigades
- Work and witness work in schools, parks, etc.

The practice of helping the needy should begin with those at home (family of faith) and then extend to the community (society) where the local church ministers. Good teaching and the practice of stewardship and relational holiness is essential to this. Efforts, rather than works of mercy, should be directed toward transforming existing structures that oppress people (Wheaton Statement, 1983).

10.2.4 The Local Church and Opportunities to Practice "Works of Mercy"

As a church, we must be more incarnational. In my perception, we need to emphasize more the universal priesthood, so that each one of us (ministers and laity) involve ourselves in an incarnational way as Jesus taught us, in meeting the needs of people. Another reason that has had an impact is that people live in debt (because of the injustice of salaries, schedules, the types of work they do and the poor management of finances). This has led many families to have exhausting jobs and women having to go out to look for a work.

Therefore, we must go to the root of the problem, taking a double action:

- a) Raise a prophetic voice as a church.
- b) Integrate evangelization with social commitment.

We must start from a conviction, based on the Bible, that evangelism and social responsibility go hand in hand (Acts 10:38). As in Wesley's time, we must show love by putting into practice (relational holiness) our genuine concern for the needy and the marginalized, as our Lord Jesus did in his time. It is through such actions that we can bring about a moral transformation in the culture where God has planted us (Stott, John, 1995;25).

Next, we will list a series of actions that are areas of opportunity for the local church.

In rural areas we need to think about more than just charitable work. We need to invest in projects that allow self-development, such as:

- a) Support for planting local products. In Mexico we have the advantage in that there is already a government project, "Sembrando vida" (Sowing Life), that we could try to support by providing what they lack: seed capital, technical training, marketing, etc.
- b) A farm animal breeding project.
- c) Providing drinking water to communities, to bring the vital liquid closer to them.
- d) Bringing technologies (such as the Internet) closer to the communities to access education and training.
- e) Periodic medical assistance days.



- f) Having an office for the management of diverse government support. Many times, due to ignorance, families do not have access to various supports that the government is currently providing (65 and older, support for families with a disabled child, Sowing Life, support for single mothers, etc.).
- g) Legal advice to avoid injustices, etc.

In general, anything that allows people to take root in their community, with a level of development that allows them to have a quality of life worthy of every human being.

In urban areas, various projects can be undertaken, such as:

- a) Training in various trades.
- b) Support in seed capital for microenterprises.
- c) Family training in aspects such as emotional management and conflict resolution, administration of family finances, healthy parenting, etc.
- d) Having an office for the management of diverse government support. Many times, due to ignorance, families do not have access to various government supports (65 and older, support for families with a disabled child, Sowing Life, support for single mothers, etc.).

10.3 Conclusion

At times, the church has tried to carry out evangelistic works as if acting in a vacuum, that is, without taking into account the context. This has led to a significant slowdown in the progress of the work. However, it is important to point out that Christ is always aware of the needs of the human being: spiritual, physical, emotional, etc. Therefore, our church today cannot limit itself to evangelism alone, but must seek to address the other needs of the people to whom we minister. We will better accomplish the Great Commission if we share with others in a way that meets their different needs as Christ did.

I believe that, as a church, we are we need to rescue aspects of our heritage such as helping those in need. In general, we need to work more outside the church. Like Wesley, we need to see the social aspect of holiness. Like Wesley, we should be aware of the diverse needs of people. He preached a holistic gospel, which, no doubt, was a determinant in the revival that God allowed him to lead. We can do the same by attending to the needs that people present and fulfilling our universal priesthood.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application.

1. How can the actions of mercy that we show to non-Christians contribute to the fulfillment of the Mission?

2. List the actions of mercy that you currently perform as a local Church. How often do you perform them?

3. What are the main barriers for men in the Church to engage in acts of mercy for evangelistic purposes? How can you overcome these barriers?

4. Make a plan as a men's group to increase compassion ministries. You should start by knowing what the main needs are in your community and which of those needs you can address.

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Lesson 11. **Grace, *Gifts and Service***

Biblical Text: *Philippians 2:13*

"...for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose."

Objectives:

- **To discover** the means God puts in our hands to be more fruitful.
- **To use** the means of grace to have a more fruitful life.

11.1 Introduction

When Jesus came to inaugurate the Kingdom of God, He showed that the values of the Kingdom are contrary to those of the world. Life in the Kingdom implies membership, citizenship, loyalty, and identity (Kraigbill, 1995:14). The Kingdom forms a collectivity in which each person has an interdependence with others and in turn, are subjects of the King. This Kingdom is the reverse of the kingdom of the world because the most humble, unprotected, and marginalized people have value to Jesus and the Kingdom.

Although it is a spiritual Kingdom, it entails a social commitment to others, especially the marginalized. Therefore, whoever has experienced an encounter with Jesus is transformed in their inner feelings and motivations.

When the Christian is transformed into the image of Christ, they will seek to exercise their gifts and serve others. In this lesson, we are going to study why it is important to serve and use our gifts in order to have a fruitful life.

11.2 Development

11.2.1 Jesus and Service

Throughout His ministry, Jesus taught us that the basin (wash tub) is the ultimate Christian symbol, because it represents His ministry of service. Jesus chose the towel and the basin, which are the instruments of the work of a slave, turning our social hierarchy's upside down.

One can conclude that, without the basin, there would have been no cross, which was used relentlessly in response to the model of government in the Kingdom of God.

Jesus reminds us that works such as: clothing, feeding, visiting, and housing the needy (Matthew 25:41-46) will be decisive for our final destiny. He invites us to take up the cross, which implies a personal decision. It is like saying to us: "Take up your basin, even though you are warned that it may bring you suffering, rejection, punishment and apparent failure" (Kraigbill, 1995:254). Thus, Jesus invites us to consider the costs of accepting to be His disciple.



11.2.2 Jesus does not reject people

Today, as in Jesus' time, society tends to create social strata or groups. Generally, we stereotype people by placing them in social boxes. This leads society to move away from those who are in the lowest socioeconomic categories. But for Jesus it was not so, He sought out the ex-convicts, the unfit, the prostitutes, the children, the women.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, the Gentiles were stigmatized, they were called "wild dogs". The Jews forgot that, in the covenant with God, He established that they were to be a blessing to the nations, but they considered themselves a special people and forgot their duty to others.

But Jesus showed, throughout His ministry, that He had come to save, not only the Jews, but also the Gentiles. Let's review some examples.

- Jesus went to the lands of Gentiles like Tyre and Sidon (Mark 7:24-30), where He cast out the demon from the daughter of a woman who called Him "Lord".
- He was in Decapolis (made up of 10 Gentile cities) where He healed a deaf-mute. That region was also where one of the miracles of the multiplication of the loaves and fishes took place in order to feed thousands.
- On another occasion, a Roman centurion asked Him to heal his servant (Matthew 8:5-13), and this centurion recognized Jesus' authority.
- He also freed a demon-possessed man in Gerasenes. To this man Jesus asked something different, for He told him to go to his house and tell the others what He had done for him, unlike others to whom He asked not to say anything.

A very representative case was when He crossed the barriers with the Samaritans, breaking multiple society rules of that time:

- He passed through a territory which the Jews avoided, so they would not have to mix with the Samaritans.
- He stopped to talk to a woman, when it was not allowed for a woman to talk in public with a man.
- That woman was living outside the Law of God.
- The woman was not only promiscuous; she was also a Samaritan.

Thus, through His life, Jesus we see that He approached women, children, prostitutes, publicans (tax collectors), sick people who were considered unclean like the leper, etc. Therefore, we are invited as individuals and as a Christian community to do the same.

11.2.3 After receiving His grace, we can no longer be the same

Timothy R. Gaines employs a very interesting figure when he mentions that after people have had a personal encounter with God, their lives have been marked in such a way that their ethics are transformed (by the Holy Spirit). It is similar to the lameness that Jacob had after he fought against the Angel of God at Peniel (Genesis 32:22-30).

They can no longer see the needy in an indifferent way, despised by society, but they see them through the love and mercy of God. Their walk is transformed in such a way that, even if they have "advantages" (better jobs, better income, more education, etc.) they do not see others as being of lesser value, but as people who have the same value before Christ. Therefore, we must seek fair and dignified treatment for them and help them in any way that we are able.

From my perspective, we have failed in the formation of disciples and many times, in the past, we have focused on a list of "do's" and "don'ts", which does not contribute to an ethic of holiness. This tends to create only an external pattern of behavior and does not lead to the search for a radical transformation effected by the Holy Spirit.

In Christian formation, the new paradigm of the Journey of Grace seeks to focus on the transformation that grace brings about at each stage of Christian maturity.

11.2.4 The priesthood of all the believers. 1 Peter 2:9; Revelation 1:5, 6

René Padilla and T. Yamamori (2003) emphasize that part of God's design for the church is that, unlike in the Old Testament, where God established the tribe of Levi to exercise the priesthood, now, with the arrival of the Messiah Christ Jesus, every believer becomes a priest. That is to say, they will be in charge of being a bridge between the unconverted and God. Each one of us, without the need to be part of the clergy, has the responsibility to bring the good news to those lost because of sin.

The apostle Peter stated in this regard in 1 Peter 2:5: *"...you also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."*

We can see this in Jesus' encounters with various people.

- When Jesus speaks with the Samaritan woman, that woman, after recognizing Christ as the Messiah, leaves her water pitcher and goes to communicate the good news to the Samaritans. (John 4).
- When He frees the Gadarene demoniac, this last one wants to follow Him and serve Him in gratitude. But Jesus asks him to go home and tell of the great things Jesus did for him (Luke 8:26-39).
- When he visits Zacchaeus at his home, he is transformed and immediately begins to make amends for his previous wrongdoing. He begins to bless others out of love (Luke 19:1-10)

Note that in no case were they appointed as pastors or to any other leadership position. However, they all went to share with others the blessing of knowing Jesus.

But not only do we see it with Jesus, we see it again with the apostles. The lame man healed at the temple gate (Acts 3:1-10), the Philippian jailer (Acts 16:25-32), and others went immediately to share about the good news.

Dorothy Bullon (n.d. a:5), quoting Dale Kleimola, points out that the roles of the Christian believer as a priest are:

1. Proclaim the gospel. The church is the principal agent of the Mission (Matthew)
2. The congregation should call leaders to serve as ministers in preaching or missions to other nations (Acts 6; Acts 9).

3. Exercise their authority to test the ministry of the Word and discern when false teaching appears (Ephesians 4:15).
4. Serve as ministers through their gifts to work together as a body.
5. Provide comfort and restoration (Galatians 6:1-2)

We should encourage one another to do good works and service, as agents of Christ's love.

11.2.5 Service, distinctive hallmark of every servant of Christ.

All Christians are called to dedicate their lives to ministry (understood as service). Just as Jesus served the Father and human beings, we too are called to serve. There is a great diversity of ministries in which we can serve. (Acts 6:1-4; Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12; Ephesians 4). For God, all these areas of service are important.

I agree with Stott (1995; 137) in that:

There is a crying need for...Christians who understand their daily activity as their primary Christian ministry and who are determined to enter the secular environment in which they operate in order to make Christ known.

He who serves exercises his gifts

The means of grace should be lived congregationally, as part of the body of Christ. In that body, we all need others and bring to them the results of grace acting in our lives. Then, as torches lit by grace acting in their lives, through the Holy Spirit they will be able to be salt and light in their society.

That operation of grace moves the mature believer to employ the works of mercy by feeding the hungry, visiting the sick and those in prison, among other works, making this holiness relational. Thus, grace operates, acting in the person, and mobilizes them to share God's love with the unconverted.

John Piper (2010) points out that "Every good work that we perform for God to repay Him accomplishes just the opposite, indebteding us more to His grace."



Although Paul had "labored more" than any of the other apostles, he declares *"yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me"* (1 Corinthians 15:10b). This is why in Romans 15:18 he acknowledges, *"I will not venture to speak of anything except what Christ has accomplished through me..."* Paul is fully convinced that no blessing in life is ultimately due to man's willing or running, but to God, who has mercy (Romans 9:16).

If we make the fulfillment of that integral mission a top priority and link it with the great commandment, the church must impact the community in a variety of ways:

- Bringing the message of hope in Christ.
- Promoting Christian compassion with their example.
- Raising a voice against all that is sinful. This includes actions such as showing as a block the rejection of the approval of laws in favor of abortion, etc.
- Promoting a culture of peace in the violent times in which we live.

The desire to know and serve God at any cost, and his passion for souls, allowed John Wesley to be used by God. His legacy lives on.

His ministerial philosophy:

- 1) Live holiness relationally, showing love on behalf of the needy,
- 2) Disciple every convert,
- 3) Develop the laity as preachers and leaders,
- 4) Teach every Christian to live the universal priesthood,
- 5) Have total dependence on the Bible,
- 6) Be stewards in the use of money,
- 7) Contribute to the education of the most vulnerable population through groups and classes,
- 8) Participate in prophetic work against all injustice, using literature to raise their voice,
- 9) Used their efforts to end slavery, which would was achieved by Wilbur Wilberforce,
- 10) Recognize the value of each person by promoting freedom, equality and fraternity. John Wesley awakened the conscience of the nation (Bullon, n/d).

11.2.6 What are we to do as the church

When thinking about the church that Jesus left to fulfill the Mission, I can think of the Great Commission and Acts 2:42-47.

- It must be empowered by the Holy Spirit.
- It must form an authentic community of faith.
- It must care for the needs of others, which is not limited to the spiritual area.
- It must go out to seek the lost.
- It must be founded on biblical principles.
- It must embody Jesus, who commands His disciples (John 13) as the Father commanded Him.

But in order to fulfill this effectively, the church (its people) must be filled with the Holy Spirit, who will cause them to share the gospel of the good news with courage. May they declare the Lordship of Christ in their lives.

It is also required that everything we do for Christ be of excellence. This will undoubtedly make the fulfillment of the Mission more effective. This requires that we prepare ourselves according to the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given us, that we adapt our facilities according to the model that serves to edify the Church. But it also implies that in order to fulfill the Mission in an integral way, we must not only supply the spiritual needs, but also see as areas of opportunity the other spheres of the person: social, emotional, intellectual, etc.

11.3 Conclusion

Just as Jesus did, His church must have room for all types of people: foreigners, the poor, children, the marginalized, people of different races. To this end, Jesus left us a model, and instructed His disciples to do the same. For this, the Church must keep in mind the model of discipleship that the Lord Jesus left us, seek to be transformed and keep in mind that the main place where it should occur is in the family and be complemented with the teaching in the church.

We can say that we are blessed to bless others. Jesus told them this: *"Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give."*

As Wesley mentioned, the greatest evidence that we are sanctified is the perfect love that we show to all people, without exception. This translates into an ethic of holiness that does not allow us to be indifferent to the suffering and injustices to which those in our society are subjected.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application.

1. Do you know your main gifts? What are they?

2. How are you currently using your gifts to reach others for Christ? How can you do this better by partnering with others?

3. How does serving or not serving in God's Work affect a person's spiritual state?

4. What might be some new ways to improve your service?

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Lesson 12. *Grace* Results in Growth

Biblical Text: Matthew 28:19-20

"Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

Objectives:

- **To promote** soul winning as an essential part of a fruitful life.

12.1 Introduction

One of the aspects in which there is greater coincidence within the diverse Christian denominations is in what is referred to as the Mission of the church regarding "to make disciples in the likeness of Christ in the nations" (Matt. 28:18-20). However, there is much of the church membership that is not involved in fulfilling the Mission.

We must then be aware that the Church is the Institution created by Christ to proclaim the gospel. It is up to each one of us to exercise the royal priesthood and become that bridge between Christ and those who do not yet have Him as their personal Lord and Savior. In this lesson, we are going to study how we can help more people become involved, both in sharing the gospel and in discipling others.

12.2 Development

12.2.1 Disciples who do not disciple?

In some ways the local church has become a clear example of the so-called "fisherman's dilemma". Let me explain this dilemma.

Fisherman's Dilemma

There is talk of a club of people interested in fishing. All the club's talks revolved around how to fish. To this end, large congresses were held and attended by highly motivated "fishermen".

Important training centers were established and courses were given on the needs of the fish, the culture of the fish and where to find the fish. They were teaching others how to fish. But the one thing they didn't do was fish.

Imagine their pain when one day **a person suggested that those who did not catch fish were not really fishermen.** By definition, a fisherman is one who catches fish. A few began to promote change and renewal. But they soon discovered that a change of mentality and tradition was not a simple thing. On the contrary, it is painful and threatening...

Author unknown.

We could affirm that "those who do not make disciples are not truly disciples of Christ". We must be honest and recognize the need to do what is necessary for the Holy Spirit to radically transform the members of the church into true Christ-like disciples. This will go hand in hand with disciples whose passion is to make new disciples. It is not a matter of having members who are content to go to church.

12.2.2 Jesus' Model for Disciple Making

In His earthly ministry, Jesus took it upon Himself to call, train and send out a group of disciples who would have the commission given in Matthew 28:18-20. In the same way, He told them in John 15:16: *"You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you."* Undoubtedly, this helps us see how the universal Church assumes the identity and purpose of Israel as the chosen people. It will be through the Church that God will bring about the restoration of humanity and His entire creation.

So, we can say in the same way that we are blessed to bless others. Jesus told them, *"Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received; freely give".*

Jesus, always aware of the great commission that he leaves with his disciples, makes sure that it succeeds. To this end, before going back to the Father, He gives them the promise of a Comforter who is the Holy Spirit (John 14:15-17). Unfortunately, the great Power that Jesus left us in the Holy Spirit does not seem to be a priority for many believers.

This ends up causing them to stagnate in their spiritual growth and they do not feel burdened for the lost. For example, if we observe that the profile of our members does not reflect the likeness of Christ, we should look for new ways to achieve it. Possibly, we have neglected the spiritual formation of the disciples. As long as we do not seek that transformation (Romans 12:1-2), which only the Holy Spirit can do in us, we will not be able to see the lost "as sheep without a shepherd."

12.2.3 The King's Mandate

Howard Snyder reminds us that evangelism is the first priority of the Church's ministry. Thus, we can affirm that the Church that does not evangelize is biblically unfaithful and strategically shortsighted. Likewise, if evangelism does not produce transformation, it is unfaithful to the gospel.

Evangelization is essentially witnessing in various ways and by various means. It is not just preaching but demonstrating the good news. We must bear witness to what Jesus has done in us by freeing us from spiritual death because of sin, the peace he brings to our lives, and the cares and mercies he renews each day.

Witnessing is a function of the church as a community. We see in the New Testament how the disciples of Jesus were planting churches strategically and leaving leaders in charge of the churches. From there, it was up to the local church to spread the good news in the city and nearby cities.

Evangelization is essentially witnessing in various ways and by various means. It is not just preaching, but demonstrating the good news.

This implies that evangelism is based on the Church. Evangelization must produce growth in the church. It is through evangelization that the Church is built up.

This evangelization is the act in which Christians proclaim the good news. But there must be persuasion in such a way that it results in conversions. That is to say, it is not a matter of "complying" by handing out tracts or just giving the message, but we must continue until the conversion and subsequent discipleship of the person.



To become salt and light, we must live and teach the values of the kingdom and the type of relationships that characterize it. These can be found, among others, in the Sermon on the Mount. In this way, we will fulfill the Mission by embodying and demonstrating these values. We will also sustain relationships in which there is mutual submission, mutual service and mutual encouragement.

We will be salt by preserving people from spiritual death due to sin. We will be light as revelation to people and culture under the Word. We will reveal to the world the truth about its condition and bear witness to the salvation of which we are an instrument. It also reminds us of the prophetic role that the Church has. To this end it must:

- Create and sustain a community of reconciled and reconciling believers.
- Recognize and identify the true enemy who is Satan. He advances by offering shortcuts, dividing the church with ideologies, movements, people. Also, with structures that hinder the growth of the kingdom.
- Renounce the means that the world uses to exercise leadership, and adopt Jesus' model of servant leaders who work as a team. Also using spiritual weapons (Ephesians 6:10-20).
- Work for justice in society.

In summary, the fundamental task of the church is the proclamation of the gospel in such a way that it leads people to respond in faith. They, in obedience to Christ, will collaborate in the edification of the Christian community. In all of this, the church will seek to reveal the sovereignty of God and replace the values of society with those of the Kingdom. It is emphasized that this will not be possible without the Power of the Holy Spirit.

12.2.4 Church Growth and Kingdom Growth

For church growth to represent growth in the kingdom of God, it must be considered:

- Numerical growth
- Spiritual growth
- Growth in its cultural impact.

Throughout the Bible, we are warned of barriers such as:

- Lack of spiritual unity
- Immorality among church members.
- False doctrines that are introduced into the church.
- Unbiblical traditions
- Structures that do not facilitate the fulfillment of the Mission.
- The existence of paradigms such as the clergy-laity dichotomy.

Howard Snyder helps us see that the Cycle in which the primitive Church grew in an explosive way, was.

1. Proclaiming the good news
2. Multiplication of congregations. It entails evangelism and discipleship. We are reminded that Megachurches show a lower growth trend than smaller churches. A suggested point is up to 500 people.
3. Edification of the Christian community. This represents growth in maturity and discipleship. This growth takes place around faith and the knowledge of Christ (Ephesians 4:8). It is emphasized that the work of the leaders of the church for the planting of churches and its supervision was done as a team. The models of Jesus (John 1:29-42), Peter (Acts 8:14; 10:23) and Paul (Acts 13:13) demonstrate this.
4. The exercise of spiritual gifts. This exercise, within the community, contributes to the process of growth. But also, for evangelization. It should be noted that all the gifts contribute to evangelization. It is only a matter of being strategic in the design of the plan. Some of the gifts can be used to train evangelism and others to implement it outside the church, with the different gifts such as service, compassion, teaching, etc. In other words, the responsibility belongs to everyone, and not only to those who have the gift of evangelism.
5. The use of small groups to promote spiritual and numerical growth is emphasized. These can be the ones that give birth to the planting of new churches.

12.2.5 Actions to be undertaken

It seems to me that there is a strong convergence among various experts on a series of points (with which I agree) that we could summarize as follows:

- We need to study further the implications of accepting the Lordship of Christ if we are to recognize ourselves as part of the Kingdom of God.
- For that community to be worthy of the Kingdom, it must adopt the values of the Kingdom. These can be seen in the Sermon on the Mount; also, in the relationship of Jesus with His disciples. These stand out: love as a starting point, trust, the opportunity to fail, humility, service, etc.

- We must start from a vision of what type of disciple Christ calls for. Once we have identified these characteristics, we can select the strategies that will allow us to develop them in those disciples. This implies the development of strategic planning skills.
- Evangelism has changed to a relational type. For this, we must train disciples from the moment of their conversion to share the good news of salvation in Christ.
- Kingdom building requires learning the Word and putting it into action. It is in small groups that this can best be accomplished. It also contributes to accountability, empowerment, putting gifts into action, etc.
- If healthy relationships will be basic to integrating the kingdom community and to evangelism, it should also be a part of disciple making. Matters such as emotion management, conflict resolution, empathy, active listening, effective communication, assertiveness, etc.
- Growth is greater if churches are multiplied. Therefore, church planting is something that should be considered in the plans of each church until it becomes a reality.
- First of all, there is no doubt that we need new leadership. But given that most of the active pastors were formed decades ago, it is necessary to reeducate them.

12.3 Conclusion

We must respond to God's call to the church to be an agent of mission, for which we must affect all areas of a person's life through mission. This is through the proclamation of the gospel, discipleship, service, worship, and pastoral ministry. This should be a normal lifestyle for every Christian.

The integral Mission must be assumed as a way of life. This can be achieved only when the church is aware of these needs and decides to act in a united way to respond as an agent of a transforming mission.

In a final reflection on how to do mission in a post-modernist context, we must be aware that we have human limitations, perhaps the tasks and actions previously mentioned are not enough to reach this group of people. But we have a supernatural God that when we do the part that He has sent us to do, He will do His part without limits, in an extraordinary way as only He can do, because He is the most interested in reaching the lost. It is about His Mission and He is all-powerful to fulfill it, I insist, when we do our part.

The local church should be seen as a reference before other social subjects. I believe then, as Mauricio Solis (s/a) quotes, that the challenge is to make the Word become incarnate.

My Commitment to God

Exercises for Reflection and Practical Application.

1. Can a Christian not be evangelizing others? How can we as a men's group begin a pre-campaign and then launch into evangelization?

2. What are the main excuses often given for not sharing the gospel with non-Christians? How can we overcome these barriers?

3. What evangelistic actions as a church do you think would work best in our context? What would make it easier to implement them?

4. What actions could you implement to evangelize people close to you such as family, friends, co-workers, etc.?

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