

LESSONS FOR MINISTRY WITH SENIOR ADULTS

MOTTO 2021:

"INTENTIONAL DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH SERVICE."



MOTTO FOR 2017 – 2021

THE INVESTED LIFE

2 TIMOTHY 2:2

MOTO: "Senior Adults can serve in many ways, in different circumstances, and places and with different people."



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Translated from Spanish into English by Dorothy Bullon.

THEME 2021: **"INTENTIONAL DISCIPLESHIP THROUGH SERVICE."**

AIM: That the senior members of the churches of the Nazarene, (over sixties and very senior adults of 85 years and older) can invest their lives intentionally discipling through SERVICE.

MOTO: "Senior adults can serve in many ways, in different circumstances and places, and with different people."

AGENDA 2021:

This is a study program for the senior members of the church, in which one topic is taught per month, as programmed by Senior Adult Ministries (SAM) of the Church of the Nazarene

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PREFACE:

Advances in science, especially in human health, have contributed decisively in recent years to giving senior adults the chance to live longer and enjoy a better quality of life.

Some senior adults, both the younger ones as well as the older ones (75-85 years), represent a considerable part of the world population (more or less 30% according to recent studies).

These are people who leave formal jobs, who still have great physical resources, and are able to participate in the common good. In fact, the percentage of the elderly is constantly increasing and that of number younger members of the population is decreasing.

Demographers have called this phenomenon "the silent revolution" which raises issues of a social, economic, cultural, psychological and spiritual order, the scope of which is the object of careful attention by the international community (UN, WHO, etc.), as well as all religious organizations.

Today, both younger and more elderly senior adults are considered, not as sick or retired people, but simply as agents and beneficiaries of the development of humanity.

The Church of the Nazarene, underscoring the dignity and fundamental rights of each senior adult, is convinced that the elderly still have much to give to social life and to their church.

We would like to guarantee that the senior adults in our churches always live in humane conditions and that we greatly value their irreplaceable role in society in the midst of continuous and rapid social, cultural and religious transformations.

We present for 2021 a series of 12 lessons, where the role of senior adults becoming involved in the task of intentional discipleship through service will be covered. They are useful people in God's Kingdom, and have a lot to offer to the church as we wait for Christ to come back for his church.

I recommend to each department of Discipleship and Sunday School Ministries to organize moments when these classes can be studied by their senior adults to ensure that they are still productive, living with joy in this last stage of their life.

With love in Christ.

Author: M. Pbro. Joel Peña López.

Juchitán Oax. 2020.

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Some important things to consider: "NOBODY IS TOO OLD TO STOP LEARNING; EVEN IN THE LAST MOMENTS OF THEIR LIFE, THEY WANT TO LEARN."

Two people whom I assisted with the Grace of God, in the last minutes of their life, taught me the above statement.

Emma Lilia García de Garcés was my Bible and Spanish Grammar teacher at the Seminary. When I went to pastor the First Church of the Nazarene in Xalapa, Veracruz, she lived in a house next to the church, and by that time she was already very old. One day, her niece called me and said, "Pastor, my aunt is calling you urgently." I quickly answered the call. When I entered her bedroom, she told me, "son, please pray for me; I'm going to the presence of God; But first, teach me well the first verses of Psalm 103. I want to say it without fail in the presence of my Lord Jesus Christ." I showed it to her, then she told me, "I'm going to repeat it, word for word," and when she finished, she asked me, "Did I do it right?" "Yes," I replied. "We'll pray now," and after finishing her prayer, she died. She learned something just before she died.

The other very elderly person was my mother Paulina López de Peña. In the last few moments of a diabetic crisis, she told me, "son, look for the hymn, *Face to face I hope to see you.*" I found it in the hymn book. "I have it mother; do you want me to sing it to you?" I asked. "No, she told me, I want to learn it to sing it to Jesus there in heaven." I taught it to her, she learned it, and sang it on her own and then died.

Older people have a characteristic learning pattern that works for them. A clear preference is shown for learning activities that involve the use of reflection, observation, conversation and personal interaction.

With this in mind, we have prepared these lessons for this year 2021, following the methodology of engagement in learning through participation. The life-transforming lesson design that we use to craft these lessons is as follows:

LIFE	BIBLE	LIFE
We begin with a situation from the life of the participants.	We explore sources of truth to face the situation that's being lived.	We determine an application of the truth to life. Doing an appropriate activity
Theme: Many people believe that the elderly are no longer good for anything.	Psalm 92:14 "They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green"	Younger and more elderly senior adults can still serve the Lord.

The purpose is to get to the real need through the door of recognized need.

I deeply hope that this series of lessons will motivate the seniors of our churches to recognize their real needs, getting involved in the discussions on the topics to be covered in such a way that they can be motivated to invest their lives in the ministry of service to God and their fellow men and women.

The Author

LESSON 1

NOBODY IS BORN USELESS.

TOPIC: We are all born with a purpose in life, and God endows us with talents and capacities to fulfill it.

Biblical text: Psalm 138:8 "The LORD will fulfil his purpose for me"

LIFE (current situation)

A famous Mexican singer who specializes in insulting men with her songs can be heard in buses, taxis, motorcycle taxis, houses, etc. In one of those songs, she screams outrageously, "ARE YOU HEARING ME, USELESS?" When I hear that phrase, I say, "What ignorance! Doesn't that lady know that no one is born useless in this world?"

But there are many people who believe it, and begin to say to themselves, "I am useless," "I don't know why I came to this cruel world," "I cannot do anything," "it would have been better if they had aborted me before I was born."

I want to remind you, senior adults, that if you have reached this age, it's not because you were useless. Quite the opposite. You have done some wonderful things; maybe not everyone has appreciated what you have accomplished, but be assured of this, God has seen and knows all about you and what you can still do (1 Cor. 15:58).

Every human being, from the moment they are born, has been endowed by God with capacities, skills and abilities to function in life. So even at this age, you can serve God and others with your talents.

What is a talent? It's the natural capability, ability, and dexterity with which God has created us so that we can be useful in life.

REFLECTION: What is that ability that God gave you and which you still have? (Think about this then answer.)

You can still develop it; possibly no longer with the same skill, but you can, especially if you do it now to serve God and others, because it's He who gives "strength and power" (Deut. 8:17, 18).

BIBLE (What does God's Word say about this?)

Read together Exodus 35:30 - 36:1, 2.

Analytically, answer the following questions:

- 1) What was Bezalel, an angel or a human being? (35:30)
- 2) What did God fill him with? What did God give him? (35:31)
- 3) Why did God give him those special skills? (35:32)
- 4) What did he have to do? (35:33-35)
- 5) Besides Bezalel and Oholiab, who else could participate in the ministry of service? (36:1, 2)

In conclusion, this passage presents an example, along with many others in the Holy Scriptures, showing that God gives all of us natural abilities **which we are born with**. Those who are **wise of heart**, apart from earning an honest living, offer God their talents to serve Him in the advancement of His kingdom.

No one can say to God that they are too old now to serve Him. Only God can make that decision for us. Do you agree with this? Or is it hard for you to say, "Yes Lord use me for as long as you want?"

LIFE (Application of the discovered truth, challenges for the present and future)

The only uselessness that God accepts was described by Jesus when he was talking about useful servants. Luke 17:10 says: "So also you, when you have done everything that has been ordered, say: **"We are useless servants**, because what we should do we did." That is called humility before God.

Older people use many intrapersonal and interpersonal resources to cope with the challenges that come with aging. A large number of scientific studies in the area of gerontology show categorically that spirituality and religion are two of the key elements that older people use to face the challenges of old age in a positive and healthy way.

While it's true that with aging we gain knowledge, experience, wisdom, financial discounts in different places, more free time, grandchildren, among others, it's also true that we experience many losses. We lose youthful vitality, and sometimes our health is affected. We can lose social status. Some parts of our body might not work so well. Some folk have reduced finances, among other losses. In spite of the limitations of age, we still have to believe that God wants to use us for his honor and glory.

These challenges don't take away or undermine our faith, and we can say together with the Apostle Paul, who also confronted equal or worse situations, "I can do all this through him who gives me strength" (Philippians 4:13). Repeat together I AM NOT USELESS

PRAYER: Lord, thank you for allowing me to reach this beautiful age as a senior adult. Free me of any negative thoughts in relation to this. Help me accept that I'm still useful in your kingdom. I'm ready; use me as You wish. In the name of Jesus. Amen.

A C T I V I T Y:

1. Based on the number of people in the group, break into small groups (2-4 people in each one). They are to make a list of things they could do to serve their church and community. Possibly a small project.
2. What can you do individually?

LESSON 2.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “SERVE”?

TOPIC: We need to understand what we want to do, and do it well. There are 19 or more different ways to tie shoelaces. Someone may tell us, "if you want know how to untie a shoelace, you have to know how to tie it." So, in order not to be mistaken, let's understand what we mean by “service” in light of the Bible and ministry in the church.

DEFINITION:

- DIAKONIA = "One who strives for the benefit of others."
- SERVICE= "It is an **internal attitude** that gives us a **servant's heart** because we know that God is calling us to serve and not to be served."
- SERVANT = "Being a servant means *giving God the right* to control your schedule and allowing Him to interrupt you anytime He needs you."

BIBLE: Lets thoughtfully read Acts 9:36-39. Use the following questions as a guide:

- ✓ Who is the central character in this biblical story?
- ✓ Who was this person helping?
- ✓ What were they making?
- ✓ What had God given them? Gifts? Fruit? Talents?

They had surely discovered that like every human being, Tabita (Dorcas) had a talent, that is, a natural ability for sewing; she was a good dressmaker or seamstress. Also as a good Christian, she had the spiritual gift of service to the needy in her community, especially the widows.

Something very important, she was a woman filled with the Holy Spirit, demonstrating with her actions her "**love**," which is a characteristic of the fruit of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer. This woman, as seen in this study, led a fruitful life of service to God and disciplined others through the works she did. By her life of service, she was winning people to Christ.

So, we can conclude from this example that a life of soul-winning service is "striving to do something for the benefit of others," as Dorcas did. The previous lesson made it clear to us that we can. You just have to want to serve

REFLECTION: What gifts or talents do you have? What abilities and gifts can you use to serve the Lord and others? Have you experienced the filling of the Holy Spirit who gives you the grace to lovingly serve others?

When we read Matthew 25:34-40, what do we see? (allow responses)

But what is it that we really should see? (allow responses)

If we read carefully what Jesus is saying, what he is really giving us is “practical opportunities to serve others, and therefore, God.

So, what does it mean to serve God? Jesus said:

- ✓ Give food to the hungry.
- ✓ Give the thirsty water to drink.
- ✓ Protect the immigrants and strangers.
- ✓ Give good clean clothes to those who are naked.
- ✓ Visit the sick and bring them medicines.
- ✓ Visit those who are in prison, especially when they are there unjustly.

The Lord wants His children to be willing: **First** we need to do whatever it takes, and **secondly**, we need to seek for His specific plan for us. God gives His gifts to His followers in a special way so that they can serve Him according to His will (Titus 3: 8).

Service, then, is doing good works for others or for the Kingdom of God. For that we have been saved (Ephesians 2:10). We aren’t saved by good works, but we have been saved to do good works, to live a life of service. Whoever doesn’t live to serve doesn’t deserve to live (Mark 10:45). Let us be like our Lord Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION:

To end this lesson, we would say that “a life of service” is a life that compassionately invests in other people, with a servant's heart, that empathically loves those in need and does the best it can, even beyond its strength, to move them forward.

Take advantage of your opportunities and develop your life of service!

ACTIVITY: Over the course of this month, let's look for a service opportunity in our community (a person in crisis who needs help) and let's do our best to meet some of their most pressing needs by:

- a) Visiting them
- b) Praying with them
- c) Accompanying them for a good period of time, etc.

Write down your experience in a notebook and read it (if you wish) at the next meeting.

LESSON 3

EXPERIENCE COUNTS IN THE LIFE OF SERVICE

TOPIC: Sharing a wise suggestion is an important way that senior adults can serve.

LIFE. (Current situation)

When we are looking for a new job, they will ask us for our experience. They may ask us what we would do if they didn't give us the job.

ILLUSTRATION: An elderly pastor once came to the office of a District Superintendent to request a church where he could pastor. The Superintendent kept looking at him, and then he said, "Please forgive me pastor for what I'm going to say. I don't think I have a church available for you. I will explain. The one church where there is no pastor is way up in the mountains and you're already too old to walk that path. There is another church that's closer, but they have asked me to wait a reasonable time to be without a pastor while they recover financially. Finally, here in the city, there is a church that needs a pastor, but they want an experienced and young pastor."

The pastor was silent for a while, as if looking into the distance, then he said to the Superintendent, "Please excuse the question, pastor, but where do they sell it?" "Where do they sell what?" the superintendent replied. "Experience" the pastor told him; they both laughed.

Experience isn't bought; experience comes out of an invested life.

This doesn't mean that a person who has not experienced something cannot help someone who is suffering a certain traumatic situation. However, the fact that the counselor can say, "I went through a similar experience and God helped in this way. He can help you too, believe it," will have a larger impact.

- ✓ Experience helps us **perceive reality as it is**, not as we want it to be, and that more accurate perception of reality leads us to make better decisions, to be fairer, and that gives better direction to our impulses.
- ✓ Experience is the **form of knowledge** that's produced from these experiences or observations.
- ✓ **Experience is more difficult** to get than just acquiring knowledge, since it entails having done it, lived it, felt it or suffered it several times. It's **acquired experience**.

BIBLE (what does the Word of God say about this?)

God is looking for people of experience, thus senior adults have such a lot to offer in God's service. God uses all our experiences, all the things we have been through, no matter how painful they have been, for the Lord. Jesus learned obedience by suffering (Hebrews 5: 9).

1 Kings 3:7: "Now, LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I'm only a little child and don't know how to carry out my duties.

1 Chronicles. 22:5: "David said, 'My son Solomon is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the LORD should be of great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all the nations. Therefore, I will prepare for it.' So, David made extensive preparations before his death."

David recognized that his son didn't have the necessary experience to carry out the task of building a temple for the Lord, so using his vast experience, he made the necessary preparations to help his son Solomon in the construction (22: 14-19).

Rom. 5: 3, 4. People of experience have gone through many tribulations in such a way that they have developed patience and peacefulness, enduring the trials of life with hope, which enables them to live with joy, waiting for the glorious manifestation of our Lord Jesus Christ, or the moment when they leave this earth to meet Christ, according to His promise (John 14:1-3).

In fact, great heroes of the faith made their greatest contributions to humanity and to the service of God when they were already advanced in age:

- ✓ The great liberator Moses was 80 years old when God gave him the task of liberating the people from the hand of the Egyptian Empire. "Moses was eighty years old, and Aaron eighty-three, when they spoke with Pharaoh" (Exodus 7:7).
- ✓ Caleb, the brave explorer, when he was 85 years old wanted to continue his adventures and conquests of new lands, and to obtain permission, he mentioned the fact that he was in good physical and mental condition and used this as an argument to achieve that task. "So here I am today, eighty-five years old! 'm still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I'm just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then" (Joshua 14: 10-11). Perhaps Caleb was being very optimistic in his appreciation of his physical conditions, the fact is that he was sure that he could achieve his purposes.

- ✓ Thus, we see that older people had a very special place in the Hebrew community. In the promises that refer to the restoration of God's people, the Prophet Zechariah said, “this is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each of them with cane in hand because of their age’” (Zechariah 8:4).
- ✓ The old men and women of the town were considered the depositaries of God's wisdom. Moses, in his song, reminds us of this reality saying, “Remember the days of old; consider the generations long past. Ask your father and he will tell you, your elders, and they will explain to you” (Deuteronomy 32: 7).
- ✓ The advice of the elders was considered of high esteem and value. In fact, every time the rulers ignored the advice coming from the elders of the town, great problems came to the nation. “Is not wisdom found among the aged? Does not long life bring understanding?” (Job 12:12).

LIFE (challenges for the present and future)

People 60 years or more are a critical and essential part of our current society. The social, technological, scientific, economic, moral and religious contribution that they provide is invaluable and, at the same time, represents a key in the process of global growth and stability. Fortunately, today this sector of the population is beginning to be seen not as a problem that must be faced, but as a group that must be recognized and respected for the changes and positive contributions they offer to society in general.

But while it's true that older people make invaluable contributions to the common good of society, and that their contributions are gradually being recognized, they continue to face **great challenges**.

CONCLUSION:

ACTIVITY: Make a list of those things in which you have more experience than most other people. Tell God in prayer, “Lord, You know everything, and here is something that I have experience in. Use me for your honor and glory. I give it into your hands for the advancement of your kingdom. In the name of Jesus. Amen.”

Remember "experience counts", and you have a lot of experience.

God bless you.

LESSON 4

SERVICE, WITHOUT EXCUSES OR PRETEXTS

TOPIC: Excuses are worthless if we chose to follow God's call and serve Him wholeheartedly.

LIFE (current situation)

We have all heard these very common excuses for not doing something, and we may have even expressed them ourselves:

- "I can't, I have a very busy schedule."
- "I don't know how to do it."
- "I can't do that."
- "I'm not a pastor."

These responses to a request for service in the church and outside of it are nothing more than mere pretexts or excuses, another way of saying "**I don't want to.**" Giving these kinds of answers closes the door long before we know whether or not the Lord Jesus wants us to enter. Surely, He does want us to go through the door. In fact, refusing to serve God is **idolatry** because it implies putting ourselves first instead of submitting to Him.

The Lord wants His children of any age, and especially those of more experience, i.e. the senior adults, to be willing to serve him **without excuses or pretexts.**

BIBLE (what does the Word of God say on the matter?)

Biblical Text: Luke 14:15-20

"When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, 'Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.' Jesus replied, 'A certain man was preparing **a great banquet** and invited many guests. **At the time of the banquet** he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' **But they all alike began to make excuses.**'"

- ✓ The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' It was nighttime so this was a poor excuse
- ✓ Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.'

- ✓ “Still another said, ‘I just got married, so I can’t come.’” But he was invited to a meal and he could have spared a short time.

This passage could be called "**The Banquet of Excuses**," and as the saying goes: "Since excuses were invented, nobody looks bad."

Definition: An excuse is an **apology** given with the **intention of fleeing from an obligation**. They are pretexts, justifications, evasions or alibis, which are used to not comply and get off with it. The **danger** is that excuses can degenerate and become, little by little, **refined forms of lying**. In addition, **they prevent us** from enjoying serving God and our neighbors. They **take us away from the joy of the great feast of the kingdom of God**, which is spreading it everywhere.

LIFE (challenges for the present and future)

The Lord Jesus Christ wants all his followers to be willing to:

- **First**, to do what is necessary for the growth of the kingdom of God.
- **Second**, find out what ministry we can do according to our gifts, because God endows His followers in special ways to serve him according to His will.

But when we have already invented the excuse "I can't," what we are really saying is "I don't want to," that we you're do it, or that we aren't well prepared, and when we do that, we are acting according to our will, and that's not right.

Leaving behind excuses is the wisest thing we can do to serve God. That is our present challenge because almost everyone makes excuses, especially when the service is difficult. We have to trust that the Lord will enable us to do what He calls us to do, and that He will give us the strength to carry out the task entrusted to us.

He just wants you to say "Yes" so that He can pour blessings out upon our lives, because they are privileges, not just responsibilities.

Ephesians 2:10 says: "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do." So as senior adults, we must accept our **blessings** but also our **assignments of service that** God has for us.

CONCLUSION: Brother and sisters, we must understand that we were put on earth to contribute something. We were not created just to consume resources, eat, breathe and take up space. God designed us to make a difference. We were created to add life to the earth, not to take it away. Therefore, as senior adults, God wants you to exercise a ministry of serving Him.

Mark 1:11 says that when Peter's mother-in-law fell ill with a fever, Jesus healed her and immediately she got up and began to serve them. This is what we must do as well. We have been helped in order to help others. We have been blessed in order to be a blessing to others. Life isn't about sitting and waiting for heaven. There is plenty that we can do before we earn that rest.

God put us here to fulfill His purposes. Jesus has a ministry for each of us in His church and in his mission in the world. Service to God isn't an option. It's something that should be considered in our agenda.

Service is the heart of the Christian life. Jesus came **to serve and to give**. It doesn't matter how long you have lived, if you aren't involved in any service at your local church so far, what are your excuses?

Abram was old, **Jacob** insecure, **Joseph** had been abused, **Moses** stuttered, **Gideon** was poor, **Jeremiah** was depressed, **Jonah** was rebellious, **Naomi** was a widow, **Thomas** was agnostic, **Paul** ailing; But all of them gave themselves to God. God did something extraordinary in them and they served him extraordinarily well.

WITHOUT ANY EXCUSE OR PRETEXT, ENJOY YOUR BLESSINGS AND FULFILL YOUR ASSIGNMENTS. SERVE GOD WITH EVERYTHING.

ACTIVITY: With the guidance of the class leader, have everyone do the following exercise on a sheet.

We will end the session by analyzing ourselves. Is there some point in our life where we have made excuses to the Lord about something we didn't want to do? Ask God for forgiveness and act to make amends.

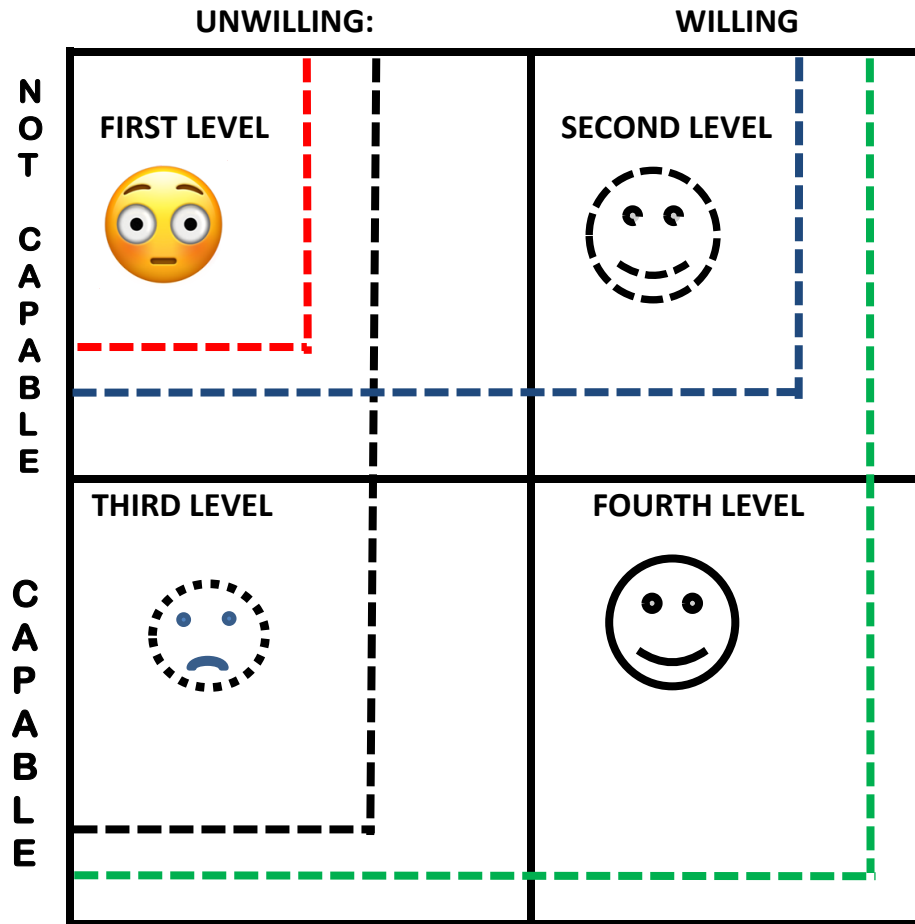
While there is life, there are opportunities to serve. Amen.

EXERCISE

We have all been called to serve God (Eph. 2:10).

As we think about preparing others to serve in the church and the world outside of it, we must remember two criteria:

Ability and Disposition:



Do the following exercise:

1. Take a sheet of white paper. Horizontally draw a large rectangle (20 cm x 15 cm) approximately.
2. Now divide it into four parts, drawing two lines, one vertical and one horizontal. You must have four frames left,
3. Then in each box write the following: in the first quadrant above “first level”, in the second quadrant above “second level”, in the quadrant below the first level, write “third level”, and in the last quadrant, below level 2, write “fourth level”.

4. Now, at the top of the rectangle, in the first half write “unwilling”, and in the second half write “willing”.

5. Then, on the left side, in the upper half write “not capable”, in the lower half write “capable”.

6. With a **red** pencil, mark the coordinates of the first quadrant and it will give you **not capable, not willing (fearful)**. With a **blue** pencil mark the coordinates of level 2, and it will give you **not capable, but willing (willing)**. With a **black** pencil mark the coordinates of level 3, and it will give you **capable, not willing (worst)**. finally, with a **green** pencil mark the coordinates of level 4, and it will give you **capable, and willing (the best)**.

- ✓ **The first level** is that of the unconverted who must be evangelized.
- ✓ **Level 2 is that of the newly converted**, who must be discipled and then brought to level four to be trained.
- ✓ **The third level is the worst of the levels**, because they are those who know how to do things, but **they make many excuses** or they simply don’t want to serve God or are indifferent.
- ✓ Those at **the fourth level** are the **committed ones**, they are the ones who serve in the church. That is what God wants from all believers.
- ✓ Once trained, those in **level 2** must proceed to **level 4**.
- ✓ Folks in the **third level** need to settle their accounts with God and move to level 4.
- ✓ Really Level 3 really should not exist in the Lord's church.

What level are you at now?

LESSON 5

ATTITUDES COUNT IN THE LIFE OF SERVICE

TOPIC: There are negative attitudes that hinder effective service, and they must be eliminated.

We need to make sure that we have positive attitudes which lead to happiness and useful service. It's no accident that some people feel down, defeated, and controlled by anxiety, while others are productive, effective, and helpful. It's a matter of attitude. What is an attitude?

DEFINITION: An attitude is a mental position, emotion or feeling with regard to a fact or state.

LIFE:

Attitudes are patterns of thought. We human beings develop ways of thinking about things as a way of facing life. Those thought patterns were formed over a long period of time. There are good and bad attitudes.

Bad attitudes are habitual and harmful ways of thinking. Sometimes we don't even realize that we have them. We get used to reacting in a certain way, our decisions become automatic, and we say that's how we are. Our negative attitudes of complaints, claims and resentments often lead us to wilderness experiences, spiritual dryness, and bad attitudes.

We affirm the following: attitudes are as important as our actions. God cares about our actions and our attitudes. Attitudes count in a life of service.

BIBLE: Numbers 13 and 14.

This is a classic passage which shows us the attitudes that God detests and that hinder the advancement of his plans for his people.

General considerations of the People of Israel:

- ✓ They left Egypt and traveled to the boundary of the Promised Land.
- ✓ The trip took 18 months and covered approximately 483 km.
- ✓ 12 of the 18 months were spent at the foot of Mount Sinai where they received the Ten Commandments, which means it actually took them six months from Egypt to the border of the Promised Land.

- ✓ They were a few steps from the Promised Land, from the land that flowed with milk and honey, a few steps away from entering the blessing and joy that God had promised them. Suddenly, everything changed!
- ✓ God told them that they would not enter, and ordered them to return to the desert. They would have to stay there until everyone over the age of 20, except Caleb and Joshua, had died.
- ✓ That was a radical change ... making an entire generation of people disappear. God never gets angry unless He has a reason. He doesn't "lose His temper" and then wonder what happened? Why did He do it?
- ✓ This event is recorded in the psalms, prophets, Gospels and Epistles, so it must have significance and relevance for us today.

Numbers 13 and 14 tell us the reason for this radical action on God's part.

The twelve spies who went to the Promised Land returned with big news. (Num. 13: 27-29)

- ✓ Ten of them returned full of fear and began to complain about the armies, the giants and the obstacles (Num. 13: 31-33)
- ✓ Joshua and Caleb brought the minority report: faith and confidence to conquer the land. (Num. 13:30)
- ✓ How did the people respond? They wanted to stone them (Num. 14: 4, 10).
- ✓ What did this reflect? Attitudes of lack of faith. Bad attitudes.
- ✓ How did God respond? (Num. 14: 11-30) God didn't punish all the people. He is merciful but punishes the rebellious.
- ✓ Only Joshua and Caleb would be allowed to enter the Promised Land. The majority of the others would die in the desert (Num. 14: 31-33)
- ✓ They would wander 40 years, one year for each day they had spied on the Promised Land, for each day without faith, for each day of complaint, for each day of gossip and for each day of criticism (Num. 14:34, 35).

If we decide or choose murmuring or complaining as our way of life, then we are going to have to go back to the desert! Bad attitudes make life dry, harsh, and joyless.

Senior adults, have you ever felt this way? As if your life were lacking in joy, in fullness, boring, without laughter? You need to remember this truth: "Those who choose complaining and gossiping as their lifestyle will spend much of their time in the wilderness."

After recognizing bad attitudes, they must be eliminated and replaced with the attitudes that God has designed for us. This way we can live with God's abundant blessings in our promised land, where milk and honey flow.

When we identify a bad attitude, we discard it, and when we identify a good attitude, we adopt it. That is the way!

LIFE:

We all complain more than we like to admit. We complain when we express resentment; we complain when circumstances are beyond our control and for those things we aren't responsible for. But complaining doesn't change anything, it just satisfies our sinful nature. Complaining releases negative energy in a way that provides momentary relief from a situation or circumstance that may be frustrating in our life.

In Numbers 11:1, we read that the people were complaining, murmuring, whining, and grumbling, and God sent fire from heaven. They chose to complain.

Attitudes don't choose us, we choose our attitudes; we select them. We cannot blame our problems on attitude anymore. We cannot say "it is the attitude I inherited from my mother" or "it is my father's fault that I'm like this." "It is the boss' fault" or "that neighbor did it," or "these are my circumstances." We choose the attitudes we have.

Like the Israelites on the threshold of the Promised Land, we may be closer than we think to a sudden change. Let's choose to practice the best attitudes.

ACTIVITY

Make a diary (a small notebook) where you write and seek to change an attitude using the following guidelines.

HOW TO BEGIN DEALING WITH MY ATTITUDES:

1. Decide to believe that attitudes are **critically** important to my life.

For example: today I recognize that this _____ attitude is important to me.

2. I understand that my attitude is extremely important to God.

God is observing and noticing this attitude _____.

3. I understand that there are serious "wilderness" consequences of choosing wrong attitudes.

I accept that this _____ attitude separates me from living happily with others.

4. I understand that I cannot change my attitudes without God's help.

Help me, O Lord, to change this _____ attitude; without you I cannot do it.

5. Decide to change the attitudes that are necessary to change.

I promise you, oh God, to change this _____ attitude right now.

6. Preparing yourself to study God's Word to learn what attitudes need to change and how to begin.

2 Tim. 3:16, 17.

Prayer.

Teach me with your Word and the direction of your Holy Spirit what I must change and what I must cultivate in my personal life. "Examine me, oh God, and see if there is in my way of perversity."

LESSON 6.

HOW TO IDENTIFY AND ELIMINATE “TIME THIEVES”

TOPIC: We will never be so busy that we can say ‘no’ to God.

"IT IS NOT SO MUCH WHAT WE DO EVERY DAY THAT COUNTS, BUT WHAT WE DO WELL."

LIFE:

I have heard many people say, "I would like to add one more hour to the day, because I don't have enough time for everything I have to do." But, even with 25 hours a day, they would keep saying the same thing because they are simply **bad time managers**.

What is time? The On-line Wikipedia dictionary says: “**Time** is the indefinite continued progress of and events that occur in an apparently irreversible succession from the past, through the present, into the Future.” So, the passage of time measures the passing of our lives. People who have trouble using their time actually have trouble investing their lives.

Time is our most valuable resource, and it has a unique characteristic because it's a resource that cannot be saved or economized. Those who say "I have to save time" are wrong because that's impossible. Time should be used when it's available.

Nobody has more or less time; we are all given the same amount. Time doesn't discriminate. We all have the same 60 minutes in every hour, 24 hours in a day, 7 days in a week and 52 weeks in a year. The difference is in the way we distribute and use our time.

BIBLE

Ephesians 5:15, 16: "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil."

Paul tells us here that the wise make the most of the opportunities that are offered to them, so the servant of any age, especially senior adults, must live aware of time, recognizing that time is their most valuable resource. We need to identify those things and activities that steal our time, and learn to eliminate them systematically.

TIME THIEVES:

Any controllable activity that prevents or delays the effort to fulfill one's task or service to God and the community is called a **"time thief."** They can be things like the following:

- ✓ Laziness or inertia. Listlessness
- ✓ Lack of personal daily planning
- ✓ Interruptions by unexpected visitors.
- ✓ Misuse of the telephone, cell phone, social networks
- ✓ Failure to clearly know the priorities of the day (schedule activities).

Proverbs 6: 6-11 What I call "the parable of the ants" teaches us that the wise use of time doesn't consist in **saving it**, as some might say, in order to have more time later. The secret is knowing how to use those 60 minutes of every hour to **be industrious** like the ants.

LIFE

WAY TO IDENTIFY YOUR PERSONAL "TIME THIEFS":

There is no value in worrying about your time robbers if you don't use a method to identify them and pinpoint why we act as we do.

ACTIVITIES CALENDAR:

- ✓ When you're interested in investing your time well, make a calendar of activities for at least a week in advance.
- ✓ On a sheet of a notebook paper, write down the date and day and in the form of a schedule and activities to be carried out.
- ✓ On the left side of the sheet, write what you need to do during the day at a specific time.
- ✓ On the right side, write down what you actually did.
- ✓ At the bottom of the page, the time that was used in some other way is noted.
- ✓ As a general rule, all activities that force you to get out and break your schedule to do something unimportant are true "time stealers."

HOW TO ELIMINATE THE "TIME-THIEVES"

- ✓ Wasting time isn't something that just happens; it's something that we allow to happen.
- ✓ In most cases, it's the result of cultivating bad habits in the use of time. A habit is formed by constant repetition over a long period of time, and usually becomes an unconscious act.

- ✓ The most difficult aspect of using time well is to eliminate bad habits and, although they are difficult to change, bad habits. With patience and dedication to use the time available well, this can be achieved.
- ✓ Therefore, develop and maintain a disciplined personal program of activities. This is one of the most obvious, yet one of the most neglected, means of keeping track of time.

AVOID THE TRAP OF EXCESSIVE ACTIVITY:

An old man was talking to his neighbor. "Today I have worked a lot," said the old man. "What did you manage to accomplish?" asked the neighbor. The old man tiredly told him, "nothing, I just worked a lot."

What does this anecdote tell us? I'm afraid that there are many who work hard, but at the end of the week or the month, they find that they have only achieved a little of what they wanted to do. This can be caused by the **"over-activity trap"** where people are involved in many occupations that don't lead them to achieve a precise objective or goal.

As senior adults, we must avoid falling into activityism; it's not helpful. We must set a goal, a simple project, a priority, and do it responsibly, on a schedule. That way we won't lack time or have too much of it on our hands.

As Solomon said, "there is a time for everything" (Ecclesiastes 3: 1).

ACTIVITY

Use this grid to learn to make your calendar and schedule of activities.

SCHEDULE SHEET TO PROGRAM ACTIVITIES AND IDENTIFY “TIME THIEVES”

DATE: _____

TO DO LIST FOR THE MORNING	HOURS	WHAT I REALLY ACHIVED?
	6:00	
	7:00	
	9:00	
	9:30	
	10:00	
	10:30	
	11:00	
	11:30	
	12:00	
	12:30	
	1:00	
	2:00	
	3:00	
	5:00	
	6:00	
	7:00	
	8:00	

How much time that I planned for did I use? _____ Unplanned time? _____

What was the “time thief” that forced me to break my schedule?

LESSON 7

THE SIN OF "OMISSION" IN SERVICE

TOPIC: Stop doing what is unproductive.

James 4:17 says: "If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and doesn't do it, it is sin for them."

LIFE

What is omission? **Refraining** from doing or saying something is a fault, or carelessness or negligence on the part of someone charged with performing a task and who doesn't perform it.

I'm afraid that there are many, many, Christians who are committing this kind of sin; that's why the present kingdom of God isn't advancing as it should and as Jesus Christ prophesied.

The sin of omission is one of the first steps leading us away from Christian **power and service**, leading to **spiritual anemia and atrophy**.

What's the problem? It's that the lack of **responsible participation and attendance at regular church services** aren't considered, by most people, as acts offensive to God, sins of conduct, more notorious and easily recognizable.

The question is, Are sins of **omission** less harmful than sins of **commission**? Remember: Omission is to stop doing what we should do. Commission is to execute an action, in this case, a bad one, offensive to God and others.

BIBLE

The apostle James says, "If anyone, then, knows the good they ought to do and does not do it, it is sin for them" (4:17)

Jesus said to those guilty of the sin of omission, "...Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me" (Matt. 25: 41-45). This passage tells us that the most **terrifying fact** is that sins of omission are **subtle** and are often practiced with **indifference**, which lead to **"spiritual anemia and atrophy."**

What is spiritual "anemia" and "atrophy" and how can we suffer from it, but even better, how can we free ourselves from it?

1. What is anemia?

Physically, it's a common blood disorder that occurs when the number of red blood cells is less than normal or when the concentration of hemoglobin in the blood is low. About 5 years ago, my face turned pale as flour, my nails also. The internist sent me to a specialist, a hematologist, who after doing some tests on me declared that I had "severe anemia." My hemoglobin count was 4 instead of 14. I was very sick.

Spiritual anemia can be a disorder caused by a variety of situations and activities such as the loss of appropriate values, or customs and traditions within the family or society that don't help us have healthy spiritual lives, which can affect our relationships with others in our community or society. It can lead to losing control of our actions, as James expresses: "What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from **your desires that battle within you**" (James 4: 1-3).

Spiritual anemia implies attitudes and behaviors such as disobedience, abuse, dishonesty, and lying.

How would you know if you have "spiritual anemia"? What would be its "symptoms"?

Most of the symptoms of this anemia occur as a result of **praying less** (lack of oxygen of the soul), a distant relationship with God, or **not being very involved in God's work** because our relationship with Him isn't so close.

Not being persistent unleashes a series of symptoms that don't help us at as we seek to strengthen our faith. They distance us more and more from God. Some **symptoms** are:

- ✓ **DISCOURAGEMENT**: Refers to loss of interest in God and family.
- ✓ **LACK OF OXYGENATION**: Lack of personal and community prayer.
- ✓ **FATIGUE**: Exhaustion of doing by making mistakes without achievements.
- ✓ **REBELLION**: A permanent struggle over what I should and should not do.
- ✓ **ANGER**: Constant anger and disagreement with myself and towards others.
- ✓ **INCONSTANCE**: Loss of interest in spiritual formation.
- ✓ **DISTRUST IN GOD**: Letting yourself be influenced by science and not trusting that God has the last word in health and life matters.

* **What is spiritual atrophy?** Physically, it's when muscles get weak through lack of exercising, reaching immobility. Strength and vigor have been lost, nerves are damaged and tissues become rigid.

My mother, due to diabetes, lost her sight, and due to the loss of sight, was afraid that she would fall. So, she sat in an armchair, from which she didn't get up, except for her physiological needs. As a result, her body became paralyzed, and she stopped walking; we had to carry her from one place to another, until she died.

Spiritually, when vital energy is lost within us, we stop feeling good about God and His things. When this happens, it's an unequivocal sign that everything is losing meaning. People like this have lost communion with God, which bit by bit has withered away, often without us realizing it.

Our spirit is like a flame, which if it's not kept alight by the breath of the Spirit of God, can be extinguished little by little, until it's completely extinguished. Paul exhorts us: "Do not quench the Spirit" (1 Thess. 5:19). When this happens, people feel that God is absent from their existence, and to fill that void, they begin focusing on new tasks and commitments that aren't spiritual.

The spiritual senses and muscles begin to harden, the passion for souls, the compassion for those who suffer, and love for spiritual things harden and cease to be practiced. **The Christian dies in life.** As the poet **Ricardo Palma** said: "It isn't the dead who in sweet calm peace enjoy the cold grave. Dead are those whose soul is dead, and they still live."

LIFE

1. **But what is the solution?** I think it's worthwhile to carry out the exercise that has been called: **"PRAYING UNWILLINGLY FOR THE DESIRE TO PRAY."**

The truth is that I have discovered that people don't pray because they don't feel like it. They don't even pray the Lord's prayer recommended by Jesus Christ (Matthew 6: 9-13 or Luke 11: 1-4). The less we pray, the less we want to pray; and thus by the law of atrophy, our lives will become meaningless, without a **true purpose for living**. The apostle Paul taught: "For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain" (Philippians 1:21).

The atrophied Christian has lost out on their capacity for a personal encounter with God, and they have lost out on the richness that comes with Christian fellowship in the church. This person no longer wants to keep their devotional time with God.

2. **Another spiritual exercise**, in order not to fall into atrophy, is **to READ EVEN WHEN WE DON'T WANT TO** READ THE SACRED SCRIPTURES AND THE DEVOTIONAL BOOKS THAT WILL FEED OUR SPIRITS AND SOULS.

Jesus Christ said, when faced with the cruel diabolical temptation: "Man shall not live on bread alone (material things), but (especially) on every word that comes from the mouth of God (the Holy Scriptures)" (Matthew 4: 4). We need to find a method for reading the Bible, the whole Bible in one year, especially as senior adults we have more free time.

3. **Another action is to give our body and soul to serve others.** "Religion that God our Father accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world" (James 1:27). "Is anyone among you in trouble? Let them pray. Is anyone happy? Let them sing songs of praise. Is anyone among you sick? Let them call the elders of the church to pray over them and anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven" (James 5: 13-15).

If we practice all these **Graces of the Spirit** in our daily life, there will be no room for anemia, nor for spiritual atrophy.

ACTIVITY

Discuss with the members of your group:

- ✓ Have any in the group suffered at some point in their life from **spiritual anemia**? If so, get them to comment why?
- ✓ Has anyone experienced **spiritual atrophy** in the practice of the spiritual disciplines? What happened?
- ✓ Can the group come up with a spiritual restoration project?

LESSON 8

CONFRONTING CRITICISM IN SERVICE.

TOPIC: No one can avoid being criticized if they do something. Act positively in the face of criticism.

“To avoid being criticized, don't say anything, don't do anything, don't be anything.”

I doubt that this procedure, which I read somewhere, will work; And I can't imagine any way to avoid being criticized. In 50 years of pastoral ministry and 45 years of theological education ministry at the seminary in Mexico, I have never been able to totally avoid that “thorn in my flesh.”

Sancho Panza asked Don Quixote while they were walking at night in the dusty streets of a village, "Why do dogs bark, master?" Don Quixote replied, "Because we are walking, Sancho, because we are walking." (Do you understand the metaphor?)

LIFE: Criticism is part of life.

Anyone who decides or stands firm in their conviction or expresses their feelings is exposed to criticism, regardless of their age. No one escapes criticism, not even those who don't express their opinion.

The point is, most of us have a hard time accepting criticism, no matter if we have lived 15 years or 85 years. It's quite difficult to accept criticism when it's justified. One element that makes criticism hurt is the intimate degree of truth it often contains.

Criticism often comes from the negative feelings that one person has towards another. It usually focuses on a weak point in the behavior and distorts it, exaggerating its true meaning.

But **when criticism is unwarranted**, unkind, or said in such a way that we have no opportunity to defend ourselves or at least explain ourselves, it's even more difficult.

Despite our gray hairs, the Bible calls church and family communities to respect and love senior citizens. But even those beautiful and experienced servants of God cannot be exempt from criticism.

Just because we are criticized for something we are doing to serve our community and church with love and compassion doesn't mean that we should stop fulfilling the task that has been entrusted to us. Whatever we do, we should work at it with all of our heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since we know that we will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It's the Lord Christ we are serving (Colossians 3:23, 24).

BIBLE:

Even the perfect motives of our Lord Jesus were misunderstood, resulting in evil criticism. As a biblical exercise, read the four gospel passages and make a list of the criticisms that our Savior received.

For example:

1. Matthew 11:19; Luke 7:34: What did they call him?
2. Matthew 9:11; Mark 2:16; Luke 5:30: Why did they criticize him?
3. John 8:48: What did they call Him? What was implied?

The most important thing in all this isn't the criticism they gave, but the example that Jesus gave us in confronting them.

LIFE:**How to confront criticism?**

1. Jesus teaches us that nothing is gained by channeling all of our energies to fight criticism. Luke 9: 51-54, (read) tells us that on a certain occasion, after a long day and hard work, Jesus sent his disciples to a village to buy food and lodging for that night for the entire missionary team. The villagers refused and the disciples got angry and wanted revenge by making fire come down from heaven to consume them (9:54). But Jesus rebuked them, and they went to the next village where they found food and lodging without any problem.

Our energy must be used for productive purposes, but we waste it when we use it to combat criticism. A Chinese proverb says: "If they splash mud on you, let it dry and in a few minutes, it will fall off. But if you try to remove it immediately, you will get muddier."

2. Jesus met criticism with understanding and empathy. When his accusers slandered him on the cross with accusations and mockery, Jesus responded with a prayer: "Father, forgive them, because they do not know what they are doing."

If we saw the situation as our critics see it, we could understand why they act as they do. However, that requires a spiritual strength that most of us don't possess.

3. Jesus responded to criticism with an invitation to fellowship and acceptance. His accusers said, "Behold a gluttonous man, a wine drinker, a friend of publicans and sinners." Jesus replied: "Come to me, all you who are laden and weary, and I will give you rest" (Matthew 11:28).

There is only one answer to criticism, and that's LOVE. It's not a sentimental, spontaneous and impulsive love, but a deep attitude of acceptance and sincere companionship towards those who criticize us.

CONCLUSIONS:

When criticism appears in our life of service, remember the following rules:

1. **Accept criticism:** Jesus didn't seem to be hindered by criticism. On the other hand, most of us have difficulties with criticism, especially when the criticism comes from other believers. We must accept that performing a task will always expose us to people. Let's remember that we work for the Lord, not for humans.
2. **Learn to Listen:** Our critics may tell the truth, they may not say it delicately or tactfully, but the truth is the truth. When criticism rains down, most of us tend to get angry, give a forceful response, or burst into tears. We want to defend ourselves, explain how unfair people are, or regret the fact that people don't understand us. Instead of all that, it's best to calm down and LISTEN.
3. **Rectify everything we can:** When the criticism is justified, let's rectify it. And we can only know that criticism is correct if we examine our hearts, pray to God for guidance, ask Him to help us listen openly and clearly, and seek the advice of others.

If, after having done all of the above, we believe that the criticism isn't correct, we must ask God for the grace to endure the opposition. Possibly we will suffer a little, but in the end, we will win the inner victory.

ACTIVITY

In a group or alone, have each person do the following exercise, which will help them examine subsequent criticisms and their reactions:

ANALYSIS of CRITICISMS:

1. Where does this criticism come from?
2. Is the whole world against me? Or, are there only an unhappy few?
3. Is there any truth to the criticism? (no matter how little)
4. Is there anything I should learn from my critics' observations?

FINALLY remember this: Maybe we should feel good when people start criticizing us. Why? Jesus said: "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you"
(Matthew 5:11, 12)

When criticism is fair, let's learn from it. When it's unfair, let's remember that there was only one perfect Servant and they also criticized him: JESUS.

LESSON 9

GETTING ALONG WITH OTHERS HELPS IN THE LIFE OF SERVICE

TOPIC: Good interpersonal relationships bless the life of service, God, and others.

"More people have become a part of the church because of the kindness of true Christian love than because of all the theological arguments in the world" (W. Barclay).

LIFE:

Older people, from their vast experience, know that building lasting relationships is important and therefore they are challenged to take the initiative to meet up with other people in a way that's not just superficial. It doesn't matter if they are Christian or not, the purpose is to impact them for the Lord and get to know their personal needs to intercede for them and help them in due course.

All human relationships revolve around human needs. All people have needs that are only met through other people. For example, God said of Adam, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him" (Gen. 2:18). That evaluation didn't surprise Adam; he had already felt needs that could only be satisfied through a relationship with another person. The basic questions we need to ask about meeting other people's needs are, Is there anything you need? What can I do for you?

I ADMIRE THE MORMONS IN THIS: In one of my pastorates in Chiapas, I found myself in the home of one of the church members who had been helped by a couple of young Mormons. Their dress code was informal, just blue jeans and V necked T shirts. They were helping John from my church repair the kitchen ceiling. They were not teaching doctrine, just being helpful friends.

I was even more surprised by what they told me: "We have discovered that out of every thousand doors we knock on, only one agrees to meet us in the meeting room. On the other hand, for every act of friendly kindness, of the 100% of households we contact, 50% accept us and they are now Mormons." They found the secret that works best: **YOU NEED TO MAKE FRIENDS WITH PEOPLE.**

BIBLE: Philippians 2: 3,4, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others."

This is one of the best ways to build good relationships as we serve in the Lord's work.

It is a cooperative relationship. The apostle Paul teaches us that in order to avoid selfish actions and motives, we must focus on meeting the needs of others. He tells us that we should be more interested in others than in ourselves. Where there is trust and mutual respect, the group will experience harmony. Jesus Christ, the Master Teacher, showed us how to build long-lasting and satisfying good relationships.

For Jesus, building relationships was His priority. He knew that good relationships were the key to people's hearts. His daily encounters show us multiple ways to build those relationships, and teach us that the world can be changed, starting with our current relationships.

Jesus built bridges to people, showing them God's love. He had close friends like James, John, Peter, Lazarus, Mary Magdalene and Martha. He built a relationship with each of them.

If you want to influence someone, you must approach them. **John 4: 1-39** tells us about Jesus and the Samaritan woman, where **Jesus took the initiative** to build a relationship. He created **an atmosphere of trust and love** so that she could lower her defenses and accept his words.

If you're going to build good relationships in your life of service to others, don't wait for people to come to you, go out to them. **Take the first step. Take the initiative.**

According to **Matthew 9:9, 10**, Jesus didn't **allow prejudice to affect the building of good relationships**. Frequently, the image of a person, or what is said about them, prevents us from building a relationship with them. Jesus teaches us that **social opinion** isn't the basis of relationships, but rather God's love and compassion.

Jesus always had a **friendly attitude** toward sinners.

LIFE: We need to recognize those issues that make it difficult for us to build good relationships others. We need to know what these barriers are and deal with them.

- ✓ Damage from the past. We may always remember painful moments and think that the same will happen again.
- ✓ Pride: "I don't need anyone so I won't take the first step."
- ✓ Prejudices: "I don't hang out with that kind of person."
- ✓ Guilt: "Before, we were friends, but I failed him. I don't think we can be friends again."
- ✓ Occupations: "I no longer have time."
- ✓ Selfishness: "I'm not willing to give up other things that I like just for a relationship."

CONCLUSION:

If you're to render a better service to God by winning and discipling souls for Christ, commit yourself to being **proactive** in building good relationships with the people in your community or neighborhood. Ask God to provide you with Spirit-led encounters with people who need the message of salvation so that you can build a good relationship with them, leading them to the feet of Christ.

Always be friendly to everyone, smile and communicate kindness. Be present with your neighbors in times of joy and sadness. Rom. 12:12.

PRAY: Help me Lord to be a bridge builder to have good relationships with all the people I know.

ACTIVITY:

Develop the following simple project to win your friends to Christ (Matthew 9: 9-10):
 "As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. While Jesus was having **dinner at Matthew's house**, many **tax collectors and sinners** came and ate with him and his disciples."

1. How did Matthew respond to Jesus' invitation to follow him?
2. What did Matthew do to thank Jesus for saving him?
3. Who did Matthew invite to his home for an evangelistic meal with Jesus?

The project is simple and gives you the opportunity to win your friends and family to Christ in your home. You can do it as many times as you want. It consists of:

- ✓ Go around you and choose people who need Christ.
- ✓ Increase your friendship with them, taking an interest in their needs.
- ✓ Take time to intercede for them before God for their salvation and problem solving.
- ✓ Hold evangelistic meals at home, celebrating breakfast, lunch or dinner, preaching Jesus.
- ✓ Orient new converts in your home, discipling them for the Christian life.

After doing the above, take them to church and introduce them to the pastor and other Christians.

Prayer

May God use your good relationships to win others for the Lord, helping them grow in the Grace of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and introducing them to their new church family. Amen

LESSON 10

BEING CHILDLIKE NOT CHILDISH

TOPIC: What happens to the inward child when an adult or elderly servant appears?

1 Corinthians 13:11 says: "When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me."

LIFE:

I have heard many people say, "we all carry a child within us", and I have always wondered: Does that person know what they are saying?

That expression is the result of the thought of the founder of Transactional Analysis, (A.T.) Dr. Eric Berne. In summary, it's a theory that teaches that in our development and life, the human being acquires three states of personality, and they never cease to be in him. The father (F) the adult (A) and the child (C).

According to this theory, these personality states are formed in the first 5 years of age, depending on the relationship of the parents with the child and their response to those relationships. This theory advocates that they never disappear from the human personality, and according to these "**states**," we respond to every situation in life as a parent, as an adult or as a child.

BIBLE:

The question is what happens to children when they come of age? Paul says: "I put **the ways of childhood** behind me." Paul is saying that as adults, we leave behind the **characteristic behavior of children**. Or in other words, we "**stop being childish**."

What happens to the child when we grow up? The answer is simple: the child is still in senior citizens.

Illustration: (if you like, bring an onion to the meeting and unwrap the layers in front of the group)

The onion has several layers. And as it matures, the layers fall away, but the essence of the onion is still there in the middle.

Human maturity has covered the child with the sophistication of an adult body, an educated mind, legal responsibilities and other characteristics inherent to adulthood. However, the child of the past is still present, often dominating our adult behavior. It's tragic to see how many adults cope emotionally with life in the wrong way in their decision-making process, like teenagers between 13 and 15 years old or younger. They manifest "childishness" in their actions and relationships. This means that these people have never gotten rid of their "child scheme." In other words, they behave like children.

What is **childish behavior**?

1. **Childish thinking is completely egocentric.**

It means that the child is the center of their own world. They care little about the feelings, well-being, and desires of others. That's why it's difficult for them to serve God and others effectively. For a childish person, the important thing is that their needs and desires are satisfied, while others can take care of themselves.

But when the child becomes a mature person, as happened with the Apostle Paul, they can dethrone the ego and accept **Christ as the center** of their existence. "For me to live is Christ" (Phil. 1:21). "But whatever were gains to me I now consider loss for the sake of Christ" (Phil. 3:7). He stopped behaving like a child.

2. **Children can be cruel when talking.**

Among children, whether playing or fighting, they aggravate, debase and mutilate each other by accusing each other. When their accusations run out, they torment each other by making up and reciting **offensive rhymes** (tantamount to bullying).

Adults often behave the same way, but they're more sophisticated, call them "**honest criticism.**" Paul tells us that when he became a man (adult or of legal age), he abandoned this way of expressing himself and being. He stopped childish behavior.

3. **The apostle Paul rejected childish immaturity.**

"**Infantile immaturity**" is seen when we make premature conclusions, impulsive decisions, or are guided by emotional biases. Paul says that he realized that his perception of others was like that of someone who wears dark glasses, so he wasn't qualified to judge. Because of that, he decided to feed his mind with faith and love that are much more permanent than childhood wisdom.

LIFE:

"Childlikeness isn't the same as being childish." What are the characteristics of a child that Jesus highlights and asks even senior adults to practice?

1. **Children are humble:** A child doesn't think in an exhibitionist way, in terms of pride, position or prestige, unless an adult teaches them to. Children are characterized by simplicity of spirit.
2. **Children are obedient:** The child's natural instinct is to obey. Children haven't yet learned the pride and false independence that separate us from our neighbor and from God.

3. **Children are trusting:** On one hand **they accept authority**. At least at first, they believe that adults know everything and are always right. And on the other hand, **they put their trust in other people**. They never think that someone can be a bad person; they haven't learned to be suspicious of the world.
4. **They don't keep grudges:** Children haven't yet learned to experience feelings of revenge and resentment. Even when they are treated unfairly, they forget completely and don't even need to forgive.

The challenge is to be like a child, not a child.

"Truly I tell you, anyone who will not receive the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it" (Mark 10:15).

CONCLUSION: Enjoy the joy of living; be childlike. Enjoy laughing and having fellowship with others like you. But categorically reject childishness.

ACTIVITY

REFLECT AS A GROUP:

- ✓ Have you ever behaved like a spoiled child at your age?
- ✓ Have you demanded that they pay attention only to you?
- ✓ Have you been rude in your communication with others?
- ✓ Pray to God and promise him the following: "I will stop being a child." Amen.

LESSON 11

USING SAVINGS IN THE LORD'S SERVICE

TOPIC: "Work all you can, save all you can, give all you can." (John Wesley)

LIFE:

I have heard many people say the following expression: "How much you have shows how much you're worth; If you have nothing, you're worth nothing!" This is a very materialistic philosophy which values life for riches, for the material things that can be possessed.

Jesus said to a materialistic crowd: "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions." (Luke 12:15) There is a popular saying, "nobody knows who he works for."

BIBLE:

The narrative in **Luke 12: 16-21** warns us that we need to learn to use money God's way. This time in His ministry gave Jesus the opportunity to establish what the attitude of his followers should be towards material goods.

There are two things that stand out about the man in this story:

- i) **He never looked beyond himself.** It's a parable full of words like "**I, me and mine.**" He was a selfish, self-centered man. It exemplifies the contemporary philosophy of "me first."
- ii) He was also a man who didn't look **beyond this world**; all his plans were made on the basis of life in this world, he was a materialist.

Illustration: an elderly man had a conversation with a young man:

The young man said, "I will learn a trade." The old man asked him, "What will you do after that?" The young man answered, "I will start a business." "And after that?" asked the old man. The young man replied, "I will become really rich." The persistent elderly gentleman asked, "And then?" "I will save." "And after that?" The young man said, "I guess I'll get old and retire and live with my money. "But what after that?" "Well, I guess someday I'll die." There was no answer to the old man's last "And then ..."

People who don't remember that there is another world beyond death is destined to one day receive the saddest of all surprises.

But still, money is more important than you think. It's always a topical issue. We're never completely satisfied. We reach an economic level, then we push for more because we always want more.

Ecclesiastes 5:11 says: “As goods increase, so do those who consume them. And what benefit are they to the owners except to feast their eyes on them?”

The most real thing about money is that when you die, “you cannot take it with you” (Ecls. 5:15). And since we cannot take money beyond the grave, it’s even more important what we do with it in this world.

Jesus showed us how to use money God's way, because in money there are blessings but also dangers.

- ✓ In **Matthew 22: 19-22 and 17: 24-27**, Jesus taught us by example that one must be a good payer of acquired debts. He paid his taxes.
- ✓ In addition, Jesus taught us about the danger of money in life. In **Matthew 6:19-21, 24**, he teaches us that no one can serve two masters. That our best treasure should not be material wealth, but spiritual wealth, because our heart follows our wealth. We invest in eternity when we use money for the purposes of the kingdom of God.
- ✓ Something else our Master taught us is that when we put God first, all other necessary things will be satisfied (**Mat. 6:33**). **Every need of our body, every need not every desire, will be satisfied.**

LIFE:

Of course, deciding to use money, little or a lot, **as God commands** has its opponents.

- ✓ Our **selfishness**, when we say “it's my money, I worked really hard for it, I earned it, why should I share it with anyone else.” “This is mine and nobody else's.” This attitude is selfish.
- ✓ **Another opponent is greed.** Folks say: I want more and more money, no matter how I get it. I want it all for me. It’s mine because I worked hard for it.
- ✓ **Worry and debts** make us feel that if we give our money to God, we won’t be able to pay our debts, and that would make us look bad to others.

CONCLUSION:

If John Wesley's formula of **earning, saving, and giving** is to be seen as the correct way to manage our finances responsibly before God, then every Christian, especially the elderly, should be concerned with what will happen to their assets when they die.

It’s our responsibility to ensure that what remains of the product of our labor should be used according to our desire to serve God with what we possess.

It's possible that this is what the Preacher meant when he wrote: "I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on mankind: God gives some people wealth, possessions and honor, so that they lack nothing their hearts desire, but God doesn't grant them the ability to enjoy them, and strangers enjoy them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil"

(Ecls. 6: 1, 2)

ACTIVITY (print the following article and invite the group to practice it)

Proposal of financially keeping God in mind.

- ✓ Make a **Spiritual Transfer to the Bank of Heaven**. Consciously and willingly tell God that everything you have is given to Him, that from this moment you are only the steward of God's resources. You will always ask him how to use them.
- ✓ Declare that **giving to God is a matter of faith and obedience, not money**. This means that God doesn't need our money. God can carry out his plans perfectly without us. However, he desires our faith and obedience in order to fulfill his purpose in and through us. Affirm it with a statement of faith. "Lord, what we have received from your hands, we give you."
- ✓ **Ask yourself frequently**, have I put God before my money and my things? (self-examination)
- ✓ **Be Generous**. Refuse to be selfish. "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35)
- ✓ **Develop a savings plan** to support projects in your church.
- ✓ **Commit to paying your debts** on time and your tithes without fail.

LESSON 12

SENIOR ADULT COUNSELORS SERVING THE CHURCH

TOPIC: God acts through the understanding and empathy of older Christians who counsel younger ones.

Psalm 92: 14-15 says, "They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green, proclaiming, "The LORD is upright. He is my Rock, and there is no wickedness in him."

LIFE:

Older people are the teachers of life according to the Old Testament. The Bible and the church generally don't speak of old age as a time of rest, but rather **exhorts** over and over again that it **be a time of fruitfulness**, maturing, teaching, sharing counsel, and prayer, because the old person is full of much spiritual wealth to share.

The World Health Organization has made the following statement: "Since 2000, the world has aged," meaning that since that date, the world has more older people than young people. Now, 8.5 percent of the world's population is over 65 years of age. It is estimated that by the year 2050, that percentage will be over 17%. We are going back to the time when "the advice of the elders was important and required in society." This suggests that the senior adult Christian should be among the first to engage in counseling as a means of helping others.

Just as God helps through the surgeon with his surgical instruments and medicines to relieve pain, God also works through **senior Christian counseling** to help people trapped in circumstances that cause stress, depression, anguish, and even insanity. We can help them find comprehensive healing, that is, emotional, mental and spiritual, of all their concerns.

BIBLE:

"Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I'm the LORD" (reverence, respect, adoration) (Lev. 19:32).

Old age is a time of true vital wisdom. That's why **young people** should **appreciate and not minimize the advice of the old person** (1 Kings 12: 6-8). The story is of how the young King Rehoboam didn't follow the advice of the elders and did badly. (2nd Chronicles 10: 8ff)

Jesus is our greatest example of how to help people get out of their difficulties in life by LISTENING. Jesus listened not only with his ears, but also listened with His eyes, His mind and His body. Because

this is how a counselor should attend to their counselee; getting involved with everything, telling them that he/she really cares about them.

In Mark 10:17-21, we read how Jesus listened to and counseled a wealthy Jewish leader who needed eternal life. Unfortunately like many, he didn't want to take Jesus' advice, prioritizing his own judgment. And it was bad for him.

Jesus was also willing to attend to those who were looking for him even at night, such as Nicodemus (John 3: 1-16). Jesus listened to him, allowing him to express himself, and then guided him into all truth.

Listening gives us the right to share with the person. There are many injured people around us. A single listening ear can make all the difference. God can put you at the exact right place at the right time to listen to someone. Jesus shows us clearly in the story of the healing of the Syrophenician woman's daughter who was at home; Jesus heard about her from mom's mouth. And he healed her from a distance (Mark 7: 24-30).

LIFE

Listening to human needs is part of our Compassionate Ministry. But it also has its opponents, the most common of which are:

- ✓ We're too busy: "I don't have time to listen to gossip."
- ✓ Disinterest: "I'm not interested in what that person thinks or says."
- ✓ Pride: "My story is more interesting. Why worry about someone else?"

Beloved senior adults, if you wish to get involved in counseling, take note:

- ✓ FORGET YOUR CELL PHONE!!! It's better to turn it off while you're meeting with someone.
- ✓ Understand the problem. Listen and analyze what they tell you.
- ✓ Take an interest in the concerns and interests of the person.
- ✓ Be patient to hear everything they want to say. Don't rush it.
- ✓ Be tolerant, giving them the benefit of the doubt.
- ✓ Show a sense of humor. Be personable.
- ✓ Always be optimistic about the circumstances. Look for the bright side of things.
- ✓ Try to instill in the person faith in Christ as a powerful presence to achieve spiritual victory.

ACTIVITY

1. With the necessary church authorizations, organize a Christian counseling team.
2. Name it “COUNSELING BY EXPERIENCED CHRISTIANS” (CEC)
3. Get the church leaders to announce it to the congregation and make it available to all ages who need it.
4. Make it FREE.
5. REQUIREMENT: commit to coming to all sessions and doing the assigned activities.

CONCLUSION:

With the assurance that many senior adults, even the very elderly, will be involved in a discipleship program of “senior counselors” in the local church, I hope that your church will grow, not only numerically, but above all, in a deep spiritual experience of consecration to God, living the life of holiness, and remembering that the Second Coming of our Lord Jesus Christ is closer than ever.

HOW GOOD IT IS TO SERVE, YES, TO SERVE JESUS, HOW GOOD IT IS TO SERVE JESUS!

EVEN THOUGH IT SEEMS TO US TO US TO BE HARD, ONLY IN CHRIST, THERE IS ALWAYS PEACE AND JOY.

AMEN.

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In a conference that Dr. H. T. Reza gave us in a pastoral retreat in southern Mexico, at the very beginning of his presentation, he said: "NOBODY IS ORIGINAL, ONLY GOD." Everything that human beings do, believing that it's something new, someone else has already done or said something about it. Therefore, we all owe something to someone, even if it's the idea. As the Apostle Paul said in Romans 1:14, "To Greeks and non-Greeks, to wise and unwise, I'm a debtor."

In this work, **Lessons for Senior Adults**, I have used the thinking of several authors who have written on the subject, directly or indirectly, namely:

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This year I'm celebrating 50 years of Pastoral Ministry and 45 years of Ministry of Theological Education. I started the "H. T. REZA" Bible School for ministerial studies in southern Mexico. It became EMAD later ETASEN. Now it's SENAMEX. I did a Bachelor's degree in Christian Ministry. Postgraduate courses in the Mexico extension program of the NTS of Kansas City, Mo. USA. I also did Master studies in Educational Sciences. I have written IPCIN Infant Preparation Courses in the southern districts. I have been the founder of Churches of the Nazarene, at least 10 in this region. I live in Oaxaca, Mexico.

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