

Live The Life!



*“...that you may live a life worthy of the Lord
and may please him in every way...”*

Colossians 1:10

Live The Life

This is a condensation and adaptation of 'The Way: A Practical Guide to the Christian Life,' by Godfrey Robinson & Stephen Winward (Scripture Union), which is no longer published.

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Suggestions

Please take your time doing this study. Be open to different members in the group speaking of their own situations. Aim to do each Lesson over two nights. This way there is no pressure to rush through the last bit before the time is up!

Try getting each person in the group to read a paragraph in turn. The person leading the group can deal with the questions, because that person should be prepared before-hand, also with any helpful supplementary material he may have. It would be even better, though, if everyone has prepared before-hand.

The author of this Study Guide is not infallible. Only the Bible is. You can and should disagree, if you believe any part is wrong. But also prove why it is wrong (and send me your notes afterwards!).

1. Live The Life! — Study Introduction

I. Learning How

Imagine a girl who has just seen and heard an inspiring talk given on television about Beethoven and his music. During that programme several pieces of Beethoven's music were played. This girl was so thrilled with the music that she straight-away decided to learn to play the piano so that she could enjoy playing that music herself. Since she really wanted to play, and had a lot of potential musical talent, it seemed that her wish would soon come true.

But years later the neighbours have to endure the daily agony of listening to Beethoven being badly butchered! What had happened to get in the way of her good intentions to play well?

To put it bluntly, she never bothered to learn the technique. She never went to a music teacher, or even used an instruction book. She never struggled with five-finger exercises, musical scales and so on. Without these, not even strongest desires or untapped potential can produce fine music.

Many of us are not producing the music of fine Christian living for much the same reason. We also have heard inspiring descriptions of the Christian life, and we've seen some good examples of it. We've been brought up within the covenant community. We know the place that Jesus Christ should have in our lives. Yet, in spite of all this, the result is often disappointing. And the reaction to our Christian living from those around us is very similar to the reaction of the neighbours to that girl badly abusing Beethoven on the piano.

That girl needed to learn **how** to play. The Christian needs to learn **how to live**. Attention must be given to **method, to technique, to practice**.

Often we have heard sermons that encourage us to live the Christian life. But it's not often that we've been told how to live it. The end, that final place for us in the new heavens and the new earth, has been painted for us in glowing colours. But the means, the way, in which that end is reached, has often been ignored.

In these Studies, we'll be looking at living the Christian life, as we see the **way** to the end.

Digging Deeper

1. "If you aim at nothing, you hit nothing." How true is this about your Christian life?
 2. Which Bible passages would you refer to about this?
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II. What We're To Be Before We Learn How

Before we go on to see **how** to live the Christian life, we first have to ask, "What is the Christian life?" So we need to define, to understand, what the word **Christian** means.

The New Testament tells us that a Christian is: *A person who has met God, in Christ, and who is trusting in Him, as Saviour and obeying Him, as Lord.* We see that the Christian life is a personal relationship. So, in other words, what my standing is with the Lord. We cannot pass the buck here, and say, "Oh, I'm okay because my parents go to Church!" No! It is a personal relationship between you and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This relationship has two aspects. We see these two aspects in our definition of what a Christian is:

First, we have to **trust** in Jesus as Saviour. The Christian life is a gift from God in Jesus Christ, and this gift must be received if it is to be possessed. No man can earn salvation by his own strenuous efforts – it can be received only as a gift from God Himself. This gift is faith in Jesus Christ, the Saviour.

This eternal life, this true life, begins when a person receives Jesus Christ the Saviour. And this life continues as that person abides in Jesus, through **faith**. Through our union – that relationship by faith with the Saviour – the Holy Spirit works out **in** us that which Jesus Christ did for us on Calvary. By this working of the Holy Spirit we are brought out of death into life - this is **regeneration**; we are also brought out of darkness into light – this is **revelation**; and we are brought out of sin into holiness – this is called **sanctification**. No dead man can make himself live, and no blind man can make himself see. The Saviour through the working of the Holy Spirit makes us what we are, and we depend totally and absolutely upon Him.

The Christian life that begins with an act of receiving must continue as a life-long **attitude** of receiving. The Christian life is **life in faith**. Some words that we read in our Bibles that show this are: believing, receiving, abiding, trusting, and depending.

Secondly, we have to **obey** Jesus as Lord. This is the other side of the relationship. As it says in Psalm 127, "Unless the LORD builds the house, it's builders labour in vain."

Notice how those who work still have to do it, in spite of the fact that it is the Lord who builds the house! God does not build the house of our Christian character for us while we look lazily on, with folded hands. God does build – through our building. God does work in us when we stir ourselves to work out our own salvation. We read of this from Philippians 2:12-18.

As we can see from this Bible passage the work of the Holy Spirit within us depends for its progress and completion on our response, our co-operation, our **obedience**. God's creative action takes places through our obedient action, and He is able to work when we work. So we are workers with God. We have received the new life as a free gift. But we must practice this gift, if the music of true Christian living is to come from us.

It is not possible to live a proper Christian life without obedient action, deliberate effort, and careful discipline. As the New Testament tell us, the Christian must "fight", "wrestle", "run", "work", "suffer", "endure", "resist", "agonize" – all words which clearly show that we must try hard.

Digging Deeper

1. Look up John 3:31-36. How does this tell us what we need to be first of all?
 2. What does being a Christian mean to you?
 3. When was the term 'Christian' first mentioned?
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III. The Way To Learning How

We have just described the Christian life as a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ, having two main aspect – trusting and obeying. Or, to put it another way – receiving and doing. But knowing this doesn't help us live the Christian life. We cannot reach the end without having gone through the process of reaching.

You cannot be in Sydney by just imagining you are there. To get to Sydney you have to arrange an aeroplane ticket. It takes practical work. Or we can think of the work of an architect. He has in his mind a clear picture of what the building will eventually be like. But the actual construction of that building will involve many different things – both big and small.

In a similar way these Studies will consider how our Christian character is built for the glory of God – for His worship and service. In other words, we are asking: "**How** do we receive? **How** do we obey?"

But these two aspects – receiving and obeying – cannot be separated. For example, prayer is a receiving. Through it we take for ourselves the grace and power of God for our lives. Yet, it is a human doing. It needs method and discipline.

Another example is witnessing. This is our active human obedience to Christ. But it is also a way of receiving more fully the grace and truth of Christ. As with every aspect of the Christian life we are all the time concerned with Divine and human action. And in these Studies we'll be seeing how we both receive and obey.

The living of the Christian life is our theme. This will involve such things as our devotional reading of Scripture, personal discipline, overcoming temptation, seeking Divine guidance, fellowship with other Christians, serving God, and witnessing for Christ. These can all be **ways of grace** - ways in which we grow to be more like our Lord Jesus.

But to be ways of growing they must be practised. We cannot just know about something – we must also put it into practice. Matthew 7:21 says: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord', will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven."

A famous piano player once said: "If I stop practising the piano for a day, I notice the difference; if I stop for two days, my family notice the difference; if I stop for three days, my friends notice the difference; and if I stop for a week, the public notices the difference."

So what we are about to do is to study together seven different aspects of Christian living, which **if practised** will help towards making our Christian lives into beautiful music for the Lord.

Thinking It Through

1. If what God has done for us is one side of the coin, what's on the other side?
 2. How does our prayer life show the two sides of this coin?
 3. What about our witnessing to others?
 4. "Practice makes perfect." True? In what sense can you apply this to your Christian life?
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IV. The Importance Of "The Way" To Learning How

In the time of the Apostles, Christianity was called **The Way**. This came from the Old Testament and meant that the early Christians lived according to the laws of God. So these Christians had a clearly set out path, which was the **method** of salvation.

What we will be concerned with is learning about the Christian way. But this doesn't mean that our way of living is more important than having the right doctrine. We cannot live a life of Christian living without having a Christian belief. So when someone says: "It doesn't matter what a man believes as long as he acts the right way," he is quite wrong!

Believing is the basis of the way that we live. Therefore it is impossible to have belief that does not show itself in a way of life. We cannot say of someone: "He's a real rat-bag, but at least his theology is right!" This isn't right, for true faith is a personal relationship of trust and obedience, and so you cannot separate it from the way you live.

We are to live the Christian life. And the Christian life is about our relationship with a Person – Jesus Christ Himself. Let's never forget that. Jesus Christ is not only the end, but He is also the way to the end. One hymn put it this way: "Christ the path, and Christ the prize."

So we are concerned with Christ, not only as the end towards which the method leads, but also we are concerned with Him **in the method itself** at every stage. And since the Christian way is a personal way, its methods are personal. Like the movements of a great symphony our studies have a simple theme running through them. This theme is:

How can I walk in Him who said, "I am the true and living way?"

Thinking It Through

1. Some people believe that it doesn't matter what you believe as long as you do it the right way. Do you agree with them?
 2. Look up what the Belgic Confession, Article 29, says are the marks of the true Christian? How does that fit in with this lesson?
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2. Scripture Reading

I. Why Read The Bible?

What is the reason why we should read the Bible? Or, to put it another way – what is the purpose of the Bible?

The purpose of the Bible is to testify, to witness, to the Lord Jesus Christ. John the Baptist pointed to Christ, when he said, “Look, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!”

In the same way the Bible exists to point men to Jesus, the only Saviour.

So the Bible isn’t there because it’s a good book with lots of stories, and some good wisdom in it. Rather, it’s a way in which we come to Christ, the Living Word of God. As John 20:31 tells us, “But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.”

We study the Bible so that we may come into personal contact with the Lord Jesus Christ, and putting our whole trust in Him, live obediently to His Word. Jesus Himself taught us about the purpose of Scripture in John 5 : 39-40 when He said, “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have eternal life.”

In these words we learn the purpose of all Bible Study: “. . . study the Scriptures . . . come to me to have eternal life”.

Thus the purpose of Bible reading is a personal encounter, a face-to-face meeting, with Jesus Christ.

The Bible can be studied in other ways, such as history or literature, but it doesn’t then speak to our hearts as the living Word of God. It all depends on **why** we read the Bible, and **how** we read it. The purpose of our daily Bible reading is to meet God in Christ, and to be spoken to by Him, through the Holy Spirit.

Digging Deeper

1. Why should you read the Bible?
2. Write down some Bible passages that support your reasons for reading the Bible, and how they do support your reason:
3. What do you think is meant by the phrase, “God speaks to us in the Bible”?

II. How Do We Read The Bible?

If this purpose that we’re talking of is to be realised, then the Bible must be read in a certain way:

First of all, there must be **reverence** in our approach. If the Bible is to be an interview with the Living God, we must read it so that we can fully concentrate on it. For example, sitting at a table where you can spread out your books and take notes easily is much better than sitting on a sofa.

Secondly, we should come to our Bibles with a high level of **expectancy**. We have to believe that we **will** meet with the “God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ”, and that **He** will speak to us through the words of Scripture.

Thirdly, there must be a **dependence** on the work of the Holy Spirit. He is the only One who can interpret Scripture and reveal Christ to us. So it’s good to begin our Bible reading with a prayer for the Spirit’s help, such as: “Lord Jesus, please unlock the truth with Your Spirit as the key. Open to me the Holy Book.”

When we do these three things, our reading, or more likely some part of the passage, will stand out for us, and apply itself to our condition. Christ the living Word actually speaks through the words in our Bible. But that phrase, “actually speaks”, is not meant that we hear words as some Christians claim. God speaks to us by putting convictions in our minds. These may be convictions of truth, convictions of sin, or convictions of positive duty. These convictions are the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts.

To read the Bible in this way means that we have to give it sufficient **time**. The value of reading the Bible in a hurry is practically nil. But if we take it nice and easy, forgetting about the clock, then we are able to benefit from it. The week should be planned so that there are definite set periods when this unhurried reading can be enjoyed.

Yet even with enough time it's still possible to read the Bible too quickly, to skim over the surface, instead of mining for the gold hidden in its depths. These suggestions will be helpful.

Read only a **short passage** at a time. Many people make the mistake of reading too much at one time. There's little value in just reading through the Bible, or a book of the Bible, in the shortest time. It's better to have a thorough appreciation of one painting in the art gallery than to quickly see the whole exhibition – because then you really see none at all. A chapter is always sufficient, and is sometimes even too much. Take just one incident or passage, and concentrate on that, e.g. a parable. Sometimes using the N.I.V. subject heading is a nice subject divider.

Read through the passage slowly, **using your mind fully** in order to know its meaning, and asking all kinds of questions about it. Make sure that you understand it, and if you don't, determine to find out by either asking someone else, or by using a commentary. It may also be helpful to compare similar passages that come to mind, or are suggested by the references in your Bible.

If the reading is a story or incident, **make a vivid picture of the scene** in your mind by using your **imagination**. Look at the different characters and see the action of the story. It's very important in living the Christian life that the Word of God should capture our imagination. Having made that picture in your mind, look at it as long as possible, so that the scene can sink deeply into your mind.

Ask what God is saying to you through the passage, and how it applies to your own life and situation. Note especially any sentences that **hit** you, and ask what practical directions God is giving you for your present life. Make a practice of obeying and carrying out these directions, because the reason for hearing the Word of God is so that we may do it. Many have found it helpful to have a notebook in which to write down each day their convictions and directions.

Thinking It Through

1. Why do so many Christians neglect Bible reading?
2. Is there any value in reading the Bible just as literature, or history, or poetry, or biography?

III. What Helps Us To Read The Bible?

The only help needed in reading the Scriptures is that of the Holy Spirit, the Revealer and Interpreter. He who gave the Word can alone correctly interpret it. But the Holy Spirit often works through a human agent, such as the time when He interpreted the Scriptures to the Ethiopian through Philip. So we have helps that the Spirit gives us.

There are many parts of the Bible that can be understood without any outside help, because the meaning is obvious. No one, for example, finds trouble in understanding the history of the books of Samuel, or the stories of the Gospels. Yet, at the same time, other people **can** help us to understand these passages better.

On the other hand, there are passages in the Bible for which we need help to understand. Many of us won't be able to make sense of Daniel or Revelation without knowing about the historical background. The Bible is an Eastern book written by Easterners with a particular background. This means that we have to understand the Eastern ways to assist us in understanding what the Bible has to teach. That's why within the Church we work together as a body to understand what the Bible says. Together we have a combined knowledge. Like a cricket team, which needs its batsmen, bowlers and fielders, so is the church. And so all Christians, though having different gifts, yet together make up the Body of Christ. In practice this means two things:

First, we are not to just study the Bible alone but also with other Christians. A good example of this are the fellowship groups in our church. Naturally the highest example of this are our worship services. That's why you should make the effort to go twice each Sunday.

V. Which Ways Help Us To Make That Start?

There are four possible alternatives. These are:

For your daily devotional reading of the Bible, there are helpful reading notes that you can get from various groups, such as the Bible Society and Scripture Union.

A more thorough course, which is excellent, is given by the Inter-Varsity Press under the title *Search the Scriptures*. This course covers the whole Bible in three years.

Another good method is to choose one of the great Biblical themes such as salvation, the Holy Spirit, the Messiah, the covenant, and so on. With the help of a concordance, you would look up all the references and study the relevant passages. In this connection, a book of systematic theology, like Louis Berkhof's *Systematic Theology* will be a helpful guide.

You will find that most of the books of the Bible are in groups having the same human author, or the same historical background, or the same essential characteristics. So it's helpful to study whole groups of books at the same time. For example, the three synoptic gospels (Mark, Luke, Matthew), the gospel and letters of John, the letters of Paul, the Hebrew prophets in historical order, and so on.

Whether or not you use one of these systems, the most important thing remains that it is necessary to have a system for Bible study. The habit of turning anywhere without a plan, like a seagull diving here and there into the sea of truth, cannot be compared with the value of ordered, planned reading.

Because the Bible doesn't consist of isolated 'texts' or disconnected passages, it cannot be looked at in a random way. Rather, the Bible is the written record of the revealing and redeeming work of God in the history of Israel, and in the coming of Jesus Christ. So it must be studied as a whole. Sometimes parts of the Bible seem dull and boring. But no part is really dull. It's only because of our blindness that it may seem that way to us, at first. We need, then, to dig deeper for the hidden gold in these difficult passages.

So we need perseverance in our Bible reading. We must have that ability to go on and on. It's easy to make a start, but the hard part is to continue on, to keep looking to Jesus, the Living and Abiding Word of God.

Think It Through

1. You overhear the remark, "Oh, reading the Bible bores me!" How would you answer this?

2. The worship services in Geneva, during the time of John Calvin, used to incorporate a time when a large passage of Scripture was read. This was part of a cycle of reading through the Scriptures, so that the congregation would hear the whole Word of God within several years. This was done because the knowledge of the people was believed to be inadequate. Could our knowledge today be just as low - if not lower?

Second, the Bible may be studied with the help of commentaries and other books. These have been written so that we can be helped in understanding the meaning of Scripture. But we must make sure it is a good Reformed commentary (William Hendriksen is a good choice, or the New Bible Commentary on the whole Bible). Otherwise we may be told the wrong meaning. If you are in doubt about which commentary to buy, ask a good Christian friend, or your local elder/minister.

It's helpful for you to make written notes on the various books of the Bible, whether it's from your own Bible study, notes taken of sermons, or of knowledge gained from commentaries. A good aid for this is the **N.I.V. Study Bible**, which some of you already have, but be careful also with this Study Bible, as in places it has a non-Reformed view point. If in doubt, don't hesitate to ask for help.

Remember that your Bible is yours to **use**. So don't worry about scribbling in it, taking notes, and so on. It is your Bible, to be used as often as possible. As Cliff Richard once sang, "The devil's not amused, when your Bible's well used..."

Putting It Into Practice

1. There is an exercise for you this coming Sunday. In one of the worship services - or, if you like, in both - you are to take notes of the sermon. Try to grasp the points, other relevant Bible passages, and the ways they are applied to your life:

IV. Where Do We Start To Read The Bible?

When reading an ordinary book we start at the beginning and read through to the end. This would also seem to be the obvious way to read the Bible. But can you imagine starting at Genesis, and trying to read through the Old Testament! I'm not saying that it can't be done, but it's not to be recommended as a starting off method.

There is a wiser and better method. As I mentioned earlier in this chapter, we read Scripture to come to Christ, the Living Word. He is present in all Scripture, but it's better to begin where we can see Him most clearly. This is in the New Testament, especially in the Gospels.

Jesus who lies hidden in the Old Testament is revealed in the New. When we have seen Christ in the New, then we also find Him in the Old Testament. For example, the Book of Leviticus does show us the person and work of Christ, when we see it interpreted for us in the Letter to the Hebrews. So by reading Hebrews first, we are more likely to understand Leviticus. It is **better** to begin with the New Testament. And in the New Testament, it is best to begin with the Gospels. Can any of you give the names of the Gospels?

From these Gospels we can gain knowledge of the life, teaching, death, and resurrection of Christ, and this is the foundation of all Christian and Biblical knowledge. I suggest that you begin by reading the Gospel of Mark, which is the shortest account of the work and suffering of Jesus. Then a look at how Christ works today, through His Body - the Church - as seen in Paul's letter to the Ephesians. This may be followed by the Gospel of Luke, which expands upon the story as told by Mark. Then the Acts of the Apostles, which is volume 2 of Luke's writings, and which is a history of the early church.

When these first steps have been taken, there are different ways in which Bible Study can be continued.

Thinking It Through

1. A recent visitor to your church asks you the best way to start reading the Bible. What would you suggest?
2. How could you respond when a Christian says to you, "Because the Holy Spirit opens God's Word, I don't need to think about doing it - I just have to be open to Him doing it!"
3. What do you think happens when believers don't have a consistent pattern for reading God's Word?

3. Learning Prayer

I. Wanting To Know The Way To Pray

One day Jesus was praying in a certain place. When he finished, one of his disciples said to him, "Lord, teach us to pray, just as John taught his disciples." (Luke 11:1). The disciple making this request knew that prayer is a necessity. Having lived with Jesus and seeing what He did showed that to be so. But what he asks here, is this: **How** do I pray?

This is something that is relevant also in our age. We all need to be taught how to pray. Yet unfortunately, unlike this disciple, we don't all realise this need. There are many Christians who have somehow come to believe that there's nothing to be learned about prayer and praying. Because of this, their prayer-life stays childish. We have to learn how to walk, how to ride a bicycle, and so many other things. Why should we think that prayer is different?

We just need to look to Jesus in this regard. It was He who "...offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears..." (Hebrew 5:7). It was He who throughout all this was an inspiring example, leaving us with much rich material on the subject of prayer.

But, above all else, it was Christ who, through His completed work on our behalf, sent His own Spirit to be our Helper and Teacher, also in this area. As the apostle Paul described it, "In the same way, the Spirit helps us in our weakness. We do not know what we ought to pray, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groans that words cannot express." (Romans 8:26).

The Holy Spirit is not only ours as individual believers. He lives within the whole fellowship of Christ. So it is that His teaching often comes to us through fellowship. Many saints following Christ's example have gone before us, and have left a rich deposit of wisdom and experience. We also have to make use of this heritage. That same Spirit that spoke to saints long ago can also "teach us to pray" through their wisdom.

Digging Deeper

1. Who is the greatest example for our prayer life, and where do we find out about that?
2. Still reflecting on this greatest example, how would you respond to someone who said, "I only pray when I'm in the mood for it?"
3. At the moment, when and where do you pray?

II. Looking To When & Where We Pray

God's people in the Old Testament offered up each morning and evening the daily sacrifice. In the New Testament this principle is further reinforced. The apostle Peter, for example, says to the early Church: "...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." (1 Peter 2:5).

Every Christian, as a part of the Body of Christ, is a priest, with the privilege of offering up on the altar of his or her heart the spiritual sacrifice of worship. This naturally is a continual offering – to be done every day again.

If this worship is to be done in the right way every day, it follows that it must be done in a set pattern. At this point, we must be very definite and practical. Our relationship with God will only be a name if we don't make it ours by making time to talk with Him. If we don't set aside definite times, we'll quickly find that the Lord is squeezed out of our lives by the pressure of this modern world we live in. And if we were able to look at what each Christian does, we would find that prayer is neglected. This is certainly not because Christians don't believe in it. Rather, it's because they have **never** set aside definite times for it.

Already in our chapter on **Scripture Reading** we have seen how important it is to allow enough time to do it, and at a convenient but **regular** time. Some Christians suggest that prayer together with Bible reading should be done in the morning and the evening. Perhaps it could be before breakfast, or together with the family after breakfast. But once you have settled on a time, stick to it! We have to see this time of prayer and Bible reading as part of our loyalty to Christ, for prayer is not a daily duty, but a personal relationship with the Lover of our souls.

As to the **place** of prayer – this will usually depend on family arrangements and the size of the house. Ideally, a quiet room other than one's bedroom is best. But if such a room isn't available, the bedroom is recommended.

It's helpful to have a desk or small table, on which you spread out your Bible and other devotional books. Sometimes we may be able to pray at some quiet spot in a park. The essential thing, though, is to be in a quiet place free from interruption. As our Lord told us: "When you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen." (Matthew 6:6)

Thinking It Through

1. Was there a helpful reminder or new idea here for you about when and where you pray?
 2. What do you think would be good and bad things about writing out our prayers?
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III. What Helps Us To Pray

Many Christians have a lot of difficulty knowing what to say in their prayer. Isn't it often that we find ourselves repeating the same phrases and ideas? It's easy to get into the habit of using these pious "catch-phrases" which have little meaning. It's easy to say to God the same kind of thing each day, until it loses all its meaning. Yet we don't speak in a boring repetitive way with our best friend, do we? So, in our relationship with God, who is far more than a good friend, we cannot help but be real and sincere in His presence. If we speak to God about the different parts of our daily life, with its variety and its interest, prayer is unlikely to become stale and unreal.

As well as speaking to the Lord of what happens to us in our everyday lives, our prayer can also be enriched by making good use of the heritage of our Christianity. We can use these prayers of fellow Christians, which are found throughout Church History, as a help for our prayers.

There are two extremes to be avoided in our prayers. On the one hand, there's the danger of depending upon the written prayers of others. This makes things very mechanical and can quench the freedom of the Spirit. On the other hand, there's the danger of depending totally on speaking as we 'feel led'. Many Christians follow this path. But their prayer life soon becomes narrow and monotonous, and changes depending on how you feel at a particular time.

The best solution to avoiding these two extremes is to use these other prayers as a **framework** for our own prayers. Let's then look at what there is to help us. The material available to help us in prayer can be grouped in four ways:

- 1) **The Holy Scriptures.** All prayer-life should be based upon and related to the Bible, for we are to speak to God on the basis of what He says to us in His Word. In this way prayer becomes a dialogue, instead of a monologue. Bible reading and prayer are very closely related, as we saw in a previous chapter. So it is that prayer without the Bible becomes without substance, and unreal, and in the end – unchristian.
- 2) **The Book of Psalms.** This has been the praise and prayer book of temple, synagogue and church in all ages. And so every Christian should learn how to use it in everyday prayer. Make your own collection of psalms for personal prayer – marking them in your Bible. This will be helpful because not all the psalms are suitable for using in this way. And as you use these prayers make them your own. Perhaps sometimes you could read them out loud. Or pray them on your knees.
- 3) **The Hymn Book.** This may seem a strange thing for prayer. Yet it has a good collection of prayers of all kinds. For whatever situation we're in, there will be a hymn to sing – whether it be praise, thanksgiving, suffering, or confession of sin, Yes – sing your prayer! Or if you're a little apprehensive about your own voice you can pray the words of that particular hymn.
- 4) **Books of Prayer.** There are many books of prayer, but the following are particularly suitable:

The Piety of John Calvin, Translated and edited by Ford Lewis Battles.

A Chain of Prayer Across The Ages, Edited by S.F. Fox.

Prayers for Young People, by William Barclay.

Prayers for the Plain Man, by William Barclay.

Three helpful books about the prayer life are Richard Pratt's Pray With Your Eyes Open, Frans Bakker's Praying Always, and Edmund Clowney's CM (Christian Meditation).

Digging Deeper

1. How should prayer be related to Bible reading?
 2. Which psalm is particularly useful for seeking God's guidance in applying scripture to your prayer-life?
 3. Go through this psalm with a commentary and sum up its different parts:
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IV. The Different Parts When We Pray

When a ray of sunlight is passed through a triangular glass prism, it is broken up into all the colours of the spectrum – from red to yellow to green. In the same way, the white heavenly light of prayer can also be broken up by the human mind into eight main parts. Each of these parts should be included to complete a Christian's prayer life:

- 1) **Praise or adoration** is the expression of pure love to God. It delights in His being and His attributes. It acknowledges His supreme work (compare Psalm 145). As we do this, we find that the psalms and our hymnbook are our two main helps.
- 2) **Thanksgiving** is our showing of gratefulness because God has given us "every good and perfect gift" through the ultimate gift – Christ Jesus Himself. This is saying "Thank You" to God. And we should do this every day so that we don't take God for granted. (Psalm 136 is a clear example.)
- 3) **Penitence**. Man always approaches God as a sinner in need of forgiveness, through the redeeming work of Jesus Christ. True penitence includes **self-examination** (the searching of the heart before God cf. Psalm 139:23-24); **confession** – which is making known in words our sin to God (this should be done in full detail cf. Psalm 32:1-5); and asking for **pardon**. This pardon should be consciously received while you are praying, since you are trusting in the merits of the Saviour (see 1 John 1:8-10).
- 4) **Intercession** is praying for other people. Here the believer joins in the prayers of his exalted High Priest, who "always lives to intercede" for us (Heb.7:25). In fellowship with the Lord, we, "a royal priesthood", intercede for our Christian brethren, and for the whole world. In this connection, it's helpful to keep a list of the people whom we ought especially to pray for, and to mark opposite each name the date on which prayer was last made for that one.
- 5) **Petition** is making our own personal requests to God the Father, who wants to know and satisfy the needs (not wants!) of His children. These requests must therefore be according to the will or purpose of God. In that way, we can pray believing that God will give us what we ask for (Matt.7:11).
- 6) **Consecration** is the offering or dedication of our total selves as a "living sacrifice" to God (Romans 12:1). This is the high point of all prayer. And so it is that each morning the believer should do this dedicating of him or herself to God for the coming day.

Digging Deeper

1. There is an acronym for prayer, called A.C.T.S.. What do these letters stand for? (If you have difficulty here, this is found elsewhere in this September 2001 [Faith in Focus](#))
2. Which part of the prayer life does A.C.T.S. miss out?
3. Using a Concordance, or an index, name three Bible prayers with A.C.T.S. in it:

In the above six forms of prayer the believer addresses God. But Christian prayer is not a one-way conversation. God also speaks to us in a properly directed prayer time. And so to these six types of prayer we must add two more:

1) **Meditation of Scripture**. This is when God speaks to us through the Holy Spirit, placing convictions in our minds and hearts.

2) **Guidance**. This describes when God helps us to consider what's about to happen before Him, in prayer. So if there's a problem or difficulty, it's placed before God in prayer. In His time, whether then or later, God gives us the sanctified common sense we need to deal with that situation.

These eight parts should all be used in our daily prayers, and they can be arranged and combined in different ways. So we are able to make our own daily orders of prayers and change them from time to time. Sometimes it's even valuable to spend a whole prayer time on one of these aspects e.g. Saturday evening prayer might consist completely of "Penitence" – a full self-examination, followed by confession.

Here is one pattern for every day that you can use:

Morning Prayer

1. Praise/Adoration (from Psalms or Hymn Book, or in your own words)
2. Scripture Reading, and meditation on that passage
3. Petition (for the coming day)
4. Consecration

Evening Prayer

1. Scripture Reading
2. Quiet review of the day – this will help you reflect on:
3. Penitence (confession of any sin you knowingly or unknowingly committed that day)
4. Intercession (for those you have met or those in need)
5. Thanksgiving (for blessings received today)

Through this clear order, our prayers stop being a jumble of unrelated sentences. Instead, the mind has a clear understanding of just what is being done at each stage.

Thinking It Through

1. How would you see practical instruction on prayer - this lesson, for example - as tying in with the promise that the Holy Spirit will teach us all things?
 2. Reflect on ways you would tackle, in your prayer life, things like...
 - a) dryness:
 - b) wandering thoughts:
 - c) self-centredness:
 - d) monotonous repetition:
-

V. To Pray Is To Go All The Way

The first and greatest commandment of our prayer-life, as it is of all our life, is that you are to: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with your mind and with all your strength” (Mark 12:30). Man must worship and serve God with the **whole** of his personality, and not just with a part of it.

A common mistake in this area is to imagine that prayer is completely a matter of feelings or emotions. This is when we say things like, “I only pray when I feel like it.” So the idea is that prayer is only real in certain situations. This is a disastrous mistake. The feelings of anybody are always changing and inconsistent. They rise and fall like the temperature chart of a very sick person. To build our prayer-life on our feelings is like building a house on shifting sands.

Of course, our emotions do play a part – but the part is never the whole, and we must never rely upon what is the most unreliable aspect of our human nature. If we do that, we are caught in a pit of despair – we become the victim of our own changing moods. To counteract this tendency, we need to discipline ourselves to praying at fixed times, in spite of what we may feel. We are here to worship God, regardless of how we feel.

That’s why our **will** is so important. When we love the Lord with all our “hearts”, that doesn’t mean an emotional response. Heart in the Hebrew language refers to our wills. Since the worship of God begins with the will to worship Him, this must also show itself in a regular, ordered, systematic devotional life. The will is the rock upon which the house of the prayer-life is built.

But the **will** is not the only act of prayer. Without the **mind** or **intelligence** the will easily becomes formalism – just a tradition without meaning. Instead we are to offer to God a “reasonable” sacrifice – using thought and imagination to the utmost in our prayers.

This total prayer, like total war, can never be an easy thing. But let’s never forget that we have two divine Helpers. In the first place, through our prayers we draw near by faith to the Holy Place, where our Saviour is always interceding for us. And then, in the second place, we have the Holy Spirit who prays within us and through us. In the power of that Spirit, which is ours because we’ve been united with Christ, we unite our prayer with the powerful, all-successful interceding of our Advocate with the Father.

And so we will make that total self-offering which is the high point and the fulfilment of all prayer – “offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – which is your spiritual worship” (Romans 12:1).

Thinking It Through

1. In which ways is prayer related to ordinary life?
-

4. Disciplined Living

1. Redeemed & Redeeming

The Christian life has two main aspects - two vital and indispensable parts - known by the phrase, "receiving and doing." Receiving and doing are two sides of the same coin. On the one side, God through Jesus Christ has done something for us. We become Christians only by **receiving** that which He has done, and by "resting in the finished work of Christ".

On the other side of the coin, these gifts of God can be received and used only by our effort and discipline. Salvation is a free gift, yet we are still to "work out . . . our salvation". The Holy Spirit is a free gift to all believers, but we must "walk in the Spirit".

In this topic we're concerned with that second side of the coin. So what we ourselves are to do. We, as Christians have to do something, yet we cannot do it by ourselves. What we do then is because Christ has died for us, and because the Holy Spirit applies that to our hearts. As Paul said in Philippians 4:13, "I can do anything through him who gives me strength."

We too say, "I can do" with Paul. And we must do! We have to take responsibility for ourselves. We must make something of our lives. As 1 Peter 1:13 says, "Prepare your minds for action." Without serious intention and effort, no progress can be made in Christian discipleship. Jesus Himself said, "Small is the gate and narrow the road that leads to life, and only a few find it."

Digging Deeper

1. The Christian way is the way of discipline, giving up many things, and hardship. Our life is not easy. Turning to 1 Corinthians 9, and reading the verses 24 to 27, identify how the apostle Paul shows this:

2. If salvation is all of God's grace, from start to finish, what is meant by the statement in Philippians 2:12, "work out your salvation"?

II. Redeeming Your Mind

One of the quotes above was that from 1 Peter 1:13, which says, "prepare your minds for action." The apostle Peter tells us, in this phrase, where all real discipline must begin. And he is reflecting what Jesus said in Luke 12:35-36: "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him."

We have to be mentally and spiritually awake. As Paul says in 1 Thessalonians, "let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self controlled." Therefore, the way that we live our lives on the outside depends on the way that our minds are disciplined.

As Christians we have been given a new heart and a new nature. So we have to use this gift by turning our minds and our attention to the things of Christ, and away from the evil things. By disciplining our minds we focus our attention on those things, which are from above, instead of those things that belong to Satan.

The way we do this is with a regular devotion time, reading the Bible and other good Christian books and magazines. We're to think about good things that we can do. We're also to have fellowship with other Christians and to be involved in church work and other types of Christian service. We are lazy if we profess to be following Christ, or if we complain that our spiritual life is a failure, if we're not using the means of grace.

Thinking It Through

1. Is it possible to have too much discipline in the Christian life?
 2. Write down the connection between “discipline” and “discipleship”:
 3. Do you know what the ‘means of grace’ are? Why are we meant to particularly make use of them?
-

III. Redeeming Your Tongue

Closely allied to how we think is the way we speak. This part of the body is dealt with extensively throughout Scripture. It is an important member of the body. A member though which can be quite unruly! In his letter, for example, James uses quite descriptive language to describe both the importance of the tongue, and the terrible damage in human relationships which happens when we don’t discipline our tongues.

Each one of us will know the damage that has been caused by gossip, destructive criticism and idle words. We **will** be judged for what we say. As Jesus said in Matthew 12:36, “I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgement for every careless word they have spoken.”

James says that “no man can tame the tongue”. That’s true. No man can tame it. But God can tame it, and this is a most important aspect of Christian discipline that is often ignored by Christians.

So, how can we discipline our tongues? Well, to follow on from our previous section, let’s think before we speak. Haven’t we often said words that later we wished we hadn’t? And it could all have never happened if we had first paused in thought.

What should we do in that thought? Here are three questions we should always remember in our conversation:

Firstly – Is it true? Of course we never tell a downright lie but how often don’t we just stretch the truth a little, by exaggeration, and by withholding all the facts. It’s hard to be accurate in what we say but we can do it with practice. And we especially need to be on our guard when we talk about those we do not naturally “like”.

Secondly – Is it kind? We can easily tear others down when they are not there. So we should always speak of them as if they were there. And if you’re not willing to tell them that to their faces then you shouldn’t be speaking in that way at all. There is a place, however, for constructive criticism. But that should always be said privately to that person, and not to others in his absence.

Thirdly – Is it necessary? Most of us talk too much and don’t listen enough. It’s best then to say less. Don’t feel guilty about silence. As Proverbs 17, verse 28, says, “Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.”

Digging Deeper

1. Read out James chapter 3:1-12:
 - a) Why is the Lord so severe on the sins of the tongue?
 - b) How are such sins best avoided?
-

IV. Redeeming Your Time

Among people there is a big difference as to how much money each has. But there is one thing in which all are equal, because God gives every one of us, each day, the same amount of **time**. Time is wealth, and we're responsible to God for the way in which we use our time. The words of one of our hymns is very appropriate here. It says, "Take my moments and my days; let them flow in endless praise." If God has all our time, then He already has almost everything.

How then are we to correctly use time?

One idea I suggest is that you keep a diary. This is so you know what your commitments are. It's also good because we can often be so busy that we forget what's going on.

We also need to take time out for leisure or sport. This helps give variety in our lives or else we become tired and stale.

The planning of each day is important. In our last topic we learned the importance of having a time each day for personal prayer and Bible reading. We need to plan this so that we can do it, instead of doing it when it fits in, or when we feel like it.

Thinking It Through

Make a rough plan of how you can best spend your time in...

- a) recreation

- b) devotions

- c) fellowshiping

V. Redeeming Your Resources

All our money and all possessions belong to who?

So they are to be used as He tells us, for His service. We are stewards who one day will have to give account to our Master for the way in which we have used His gifts. So we have to be careful in the way we use money. We have to learn also to live within our income. Romans 13:8 tells us: "Let no debt remain outstanding."

Although this may be hard for those who don't earn much, yet it's good advice. We shouldn't owe anyone anything. Just think of buying a car. If you take out hire purchase on that car did you know that you'd be paying a lot more interest than if you got a loan from a bank? It's better of course to buy your car with straight cash.

A good thing is that you budget all your money. So you write what you spend, how much you get in, and so on. This helps you see where you spend your money, and it also tells us whether or not we're living within our incomes. It shows how our money is being spent, and so we can see if we're spending too much, or buying those little "extras" we don't really need.

When you make up your budget book decide where your money should go. A certain amount has to go on food and board, petrol and other things to do with your job.

But before these essentials have been sorted out you should be setting aside a regular weekly amount for the work of the Church. An amount we should still be giving even if we're away for the weekend - or a long holiday!

We should also share in the work of our local biblically based educational institutions, biblically based political and ethical ministries, and biblically based Word & Deed charities.

The important thing is that this giving should be regular and ordered, and not left to how we're feeling at that particular moment.

And we should also use God's money in keeping ourselves fit and relaxed e.g. playing sport.

In this very greedy and money-worshipping age that we live in we are to set a good example for those around us. Whatever we have can be used for the service of God. For example, if you have a car you can use that to give others a lift to youth club, or to church.

Digging Deeper

1. Read Genesis 14:18-20. Does Melchizedek's example give any guidance for how we give to the church today?
2. Glean out from the Old Testament other passages for how much was given to the LORD:
3. Are there any New Testament passages which can guide us too?

VI. Redeeming Your Body

Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. So we must keep our bodies pure and holy, and devoted completely to serving Christ. It will be difficult, but by careful training and discipline the body can become a good instrument of the Spirit of Christ.

We must try, as much as possible, to have a strong and healthy body, for the service of God and man. Recreation, plenty of fresh air, outdoor exercises and sport, are important for the Christian. It's much better to join in games rather than just watch them. Doing exercise every day, taking a jog and other ways of "keeping fit" are good. Having a tough, well-trained body helps in our spiritual life.

We are to avoid laziness. We have to use our time profitably. Eating, drinking and smoking too much, are sins against the body, and against the Holy Spirit. There must be also a firm control of our sexual impulses. And this begins already with our thoughts and in our imaginations.

Our bodies have been created by God and all our instincts and impulses can be used in His service. We're not to put down our bodies as hermits and monks in monasteries do. Instead we're to be Christ's athletes, accepting, controlling, using, directing and dedicating all our bodily, mental and spiritual powers to our Master's service.

Digging Deeper

1. The apostle Paul wrote, in 2nd Corinthians 9:27, "I beat my body and make it my slave." Look up this text, put it in its context, and work out the different ways we can glorify the Lord through our personal physical care:

VII. Redeeming Rewarded!

In conclusion, two points must be mentioned.

Firstly, there is a warning. Many people fail to live a disciplined life, not because they do not make the attempt, but because it's not an all round attempt. It's useless to concentrate on one part of life and to ignore another part because eventually the bad part will influence the other part.

Secondly, there is an encouragement. The setting up of the disciplined life is a slow process, which cannot be achieved in the twinkling of an eye or by waving a magic wand.

An athlete becomes good by constant training. We have to be good soldiers for Christ. No one can carry out what has just been suggested unless they have the military qualities of courage, endurance, obedience and discipline. Our Commander calls us to leave behind soft, spoilt and spineless living, and to endure hardship like a good soldier of Christ Jesus. And we as Christian soldiers will not fail to do this because our aim is to please our Commander, to please Him who first enfolded us as His Soldiers.

Thinking It Through

Christians are not to be quitters. Using Hebrews 10:36, bring out how you will receive what the Lord has promised right now, through your disciplined life:

5. Temptation Tackled

1. The Fact Of Temptation

There's an old saying, attributed to Martin Luther, which goes: 'You can't help birds flying over your head, but you can stop them from building their nest in your hair!'

This may seem a strange saying. But it does tell us, in an interesting way, two facts about temptation: firstly that everyone will be tempted; and, secondly, that such temptation can be resisted and overcome.

In this topic we'll mostly be concerned with the resisting and overcoming of temptation. But let's first have a look at that fact of everyone being tempted.

Temptation is a universal experience. No one from of the whole human race is exempt, is free, from it. It touches us all.

This is a truth clearly found in Scripture. Romans 3:23 has the well-known words, "For **all** have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God." These words tell us that everyone has been tempted, and will still be tempted. No one is in a position to choose whether he will be tempted or not. Because we have no choice about whether or not we're tempted, it isn't wrong to be tempted. It is not wrong to be tempted, but it is wrong to **yield** to temptation.

It is essential that we understand this important difference. For example, our Lord Jesus was severely tempted, not only at the beginning, but also throughout His ministry here on earth. Yet He was completely without sin.

We too will be tempted. And we must expect it, for "to be forewarned is to be forearmed". But we can overcome temptation through Him "who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet was without sin". (Hebrews 4:15) As Hebrews 2:18 tells us: "Because he himself suffered when he was tempted, he is able to help those who are being tempted."

Digging Deeper

1. Read 1 Corinthians 10:1-13. How do these words show us the truth of what is written above?

2. What advice would you give to someone who says to you that the harder he tries to conquer a particular sin, the more he seems to fail?

2. The One Behind Temptation

Jesus says in Mark 14:38: "Watch and pray so that you will not fall into temptation." In this and other similar sayings our Lord impresses on us the need for constant watchfulness and mental alertness if we're to overcome temptation.

The Apostles continued to emphasise and develop the teaching of Jesus on temptation. Paul says in 1 Thessalonians 5:6: "So then, let us not be like others, who are asleep, but let us be alert and self controlled."

And Peter says in 1 Peter 5:8: "Be self controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour."

In this verse Peter tells us why we're to be so watchful. It's the devil who is very sneakily trying to suck us in. That's why we have to put on the whole armour of God, as found in Ephesians 6, so that we can be alert to his crafty ways.

Many people fall victim to temptation because they become too self-confident. They think they'll be alright! Yet this in itself is a subtle temptation. "So if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"

So we have to **WATCH! WATCH OUT!** And we also have to **pray**.

Here again our Lord Jesus is our example. When He was in His darkest hour of trial in Gethsemane, He first told the three Apostles to pray, and then He prayed Himself.

Christ's greatest model for prayer, the Lord's Prayer, shows how we should pray in regards to temptation, when it says: "...and deliver us from evil."

It is in prayer that we take for ourselves the strength and grace of God to overcome temptation. Whenever we 'lift up holy hands in prayer' our spiritual enemy is defeated, as when Moses on the hill defeated Amalek with the uplifted hands of intercession.

It's very important, though, in prayer, not to concentrate upon the sin. The mind should be focused on God. So the focus in prayer should be on the **positive** not the **negative**. It's always wrong to concentrate on sin. For example, don't pray, "O Lord,

deliver me from my bad temper”, but rather, “O Lord, give me your Holy Spirit, and especially His fruits of patience, self-control and peace.”

The rule is, concentrate in prayer on the positive graces or virtues you need, and not on the vices or faults you wish to overcome.

Digger Deeper

1. Read Job 1:6-22. What does this tell us about the devil and the faithful believer?
 2. Which other devices does the devil use against the believer?
 3. How can a Christian prepare himself in advance to resist future temptations? What does Matthew 12:43-45 teach us in this regard?
-

3. The Place Of Temptation

In Matthew 12:43-45 we saw the picture of someone who has had a spring-clean and has been left nice and empty. We also saw, however, that unless this person fills up himself or herself with Jesus Christ then he or she will become filled up with even more evil things.

It is a fact that the empty life will be filled with sin. Evil can never be driven out by a direct and sustained attempt to keep it out. Evil can only be driven out by taking in the good.

Many people are trying, in a constant and tiring struggle, to drive out the “demons”, and often they wonder why they have so little success. You see, they’re attempting to be good – for nothing. That same energy should be diverted to the positive job of filling the house of the heart with good tenants, so that when the “demons” peep in through the windows they will find it full and occupied.

What does it mean to fill the house? It means this – to invite in the Lord Jesus Christ. Let your life be fired with the joy of love for Him. Seek the friendship of His disciples, make good friends, and enjoy real satisfying fellowship. Throw yourself with energy and enthusiasm into His work, making the Kingdom your dominating purpose. Spend time each day in prayer, Scripture reading and meditation. So, let **all** your powers be fully involved in the worship and service of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thinking It Through

1. How would you deal with temptation? Can you think of any biblical examples here?
-

4. The Way of Temptation

Once upon a time an Arab camel-driver was asleep in his tent in the desert on a bitterly, cold night. In the middle of the night he woke up to find that his camel had pushed its nose beneath the flap of the tent, and he was about to protest when he realised that only a very little of the camel was inside, so it didn’t matter much.

On waking up later, however, he found that the camel had put its whole head and long hairy neck into the tent. The Arab now aroused himself from his sleep to protest, but the camel prevented him by saying, “Oh, do you really mind? It is so terribly cold outside, and I won’t come in any further.” The man went off to sleep again, but on waking the third time he was really alarmed to see that the camel’s front legs and hump were now in the tent. As he was about to leap to his feet and drive it out, the camel said again, “Now I solemnly promise this time that I won’t come in another single inch – and besides, it’s warmer for you in the tent if there are two of us inside”. The Arab was lazy that, in spite of the growing worry in his mind, he fell off to sleep again. Very soon, however, he awoke with a cry of terror, “Help!” for he found the heavy weight of the camel on top of him. “If it’s room you want,” said the beast in answer to his cry, “there’s plenty of room outside – get out!”

Sin, like the camel, does not walk right into the tent of a man's life. If it attempted to do that, we would repel it at once. Sin worms its way by gradual stages. The Arab had no intention of allowing the camel to take possession of the tent. But the beast did so, because he dallied with it, instead of decisively repelling it.

Now sin gets hold of us in temptation in four quite distinct phases. First of all an evil **thought** enters into the mind (this is the camel's nose), and if it is not at once repelled it passes into the second stage of **imagination**. That is, we begin to picture ourselves doing the evil thing (the camel's head and neck). To picture evil, however, awakens and rouses the **desire** to do evil (the camel's legs and hump). This in turn pushes us toward the evil **action**.

No man can help evil thoughts entering his head – everyone has them, which is only another way of saying that we are all tempted. But we can all prevent evil thoughts from passing over into evil imaginations and desires. “You can't help birds flying over your head, but you can stop them from building their nest in your hair!” The rule is to always deal with temptation when it first comes in your mind, and don't play with it. Deal with the camel when he first puts his nose through the flap of the tent, for you'll find it most difficult to deal with him in the later stages. Don't play with fire!

Digger Deeper

1. Where in Scripture does it speak of a particular situation which a believer was not able to overcome?
2. Do you think there's any significance in his mentioning that it was three times he prayed about it?
3. What was the Lord's guidance for him then?

5. The Focus Against Temptation

Many Christians find themselves constantly hindered by one particular sin that causes them to stumble again and again. The sin is often called, “the besetting sin.” The entire struggle seems to be focused on that one particular point.

First of all it should be pointed out that it's wrong to concentrate on any one sin. This is often the main cause of the difficulty. If we just focus on one thing we don't see how God is concerned with the transformation of our **whole** nature. So as Christians we must co-operate with the Holy Spirit in an all-round discipline, and avoid any tendency to focus on a few selected faults or “sins”. This works the same way as the educational philosophy that focuses on building up the good, and then the not so good will be improved as well.

Another reason for repeated failure is when we don't accept and use in a right way the strong instincts, impulses, and desires that are within us. None of these instincts and emotions are wrong, but they become wrong when they're used for the wrong end. But we can use these instincts and emotions for God.

Paul was a born fighter, but he did not use that ability to hit his neighbour in the face. He instead used and directed it in fighting “the good fight”. We too can use all that there is in us in a right way, and so it will not erupt like a volcano in a wrong and destructive way.

We also have to realise that discipline can never be achieved at any point just by waving some sort of magic wand. It is only by constantly doing little practical acts of self-discipline that we become truly disciplined. We grow in our Lord in the same way that the athlete gains his strength and skill – by constant practice.

Thinking It Through

1. How do you show in your everyday life that Jesus has overcome sin?

6. The Force Fighting Temptation

We are all tempted. But what should we do in the actual moment of temptation? We've already seen that we shouldn't focus on the evil thing itself. The way to overcome temptation is not to fight evil, for in order to fight evil the attention has to be concentrated on it, and the more we concentrate on fighting evil **within** ourselves, the more we will be enslaved in it.

The right thing to do is to **redirect the attention** to look elsewhere. For the Christian that means, "looking unto Jesus".

When our mind is turned to Jesus, evil loses its appeal, and we are reinforced by His power and grace. It's deadly to all true spiritual progress to be busy with yourself, especially with your own temptations.

Rather, in times of temptation, we have to establish the discipline of looking away from ourselves to our Redeemer in His holiness and power. As Hebrews 12:1-2 tell us: "...let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."

Thinking It Through

1. Why must we focus on Jesus rather than anywhere else?

 2. When we do that, through His Word, how does that help us?
-

7. The Victory Through Temptation

This takes us to the very heart of the Gospel. "Christ died for our sins" – it is just these five words that make all the difference to the way in which the Christian must face sin and temptation.

Calvary was a battlefield. There our Lord fought with all the hosts of darkness on the cross. **Jesus won!** The Cross is a complete victory, a decisive triumph. This has happened, and it makes all the difference. The Christian doesn't have to struggle to win a victory over evil. If that was the case then Christ died in vain.

The Christian's true task is to take to himself a victory already won. The discipline of the Christian life is so that we can take to ourselves that victory. The reason for our defeats is that we do not believe, we do not receive, we do not trust. Since Jesus is our Saviour we have to look to Him in times of temptation.

According to an American Indian legend, a massive warrior once went into battle and fought with a ferocity and energy that no one could resist, and he killed many of the enemy. Eventually he met with one stronger than himself, and in the struggle they had, his head was cut off. But so strenuously was he fighting that even when his head was cut off his body went on dealing out blows. In this way he killed several more soldiers, until at last someone shouted out to him – "Look, your head's off!" At that he collapsed into death.

The head of sin has been cut off on Calvary by the "Strong Son of God", but the monster goes on injuring and killing people because they don't tell him so. Sin has no power, except of unbelief. On the battlefield of temptation, the Christian, like the Emperor Constantine, must lift up his eyes to the Cross and see in letters of fire the words, "In this sign conquer".

Thinking It Through

1. How has this lesson helped you to realise the power of temptation, and the strength and guidance of the Lord to fight it?
-

6. God's Guidance

1. God speaks

Should every Christian expect to receive the guidance of God?

If we look in our Bibles there is clear evidence for God guiding His saints. The children of Israel, for example, while they were travelling through the wilderness, had the pillar of fire by night and the cloud by day.

And God said to David in Psalm 32: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you." In the New Testament we have the words of our Lord Himself: "...when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth...he will tell you what is yet to come." And the early Church, as we see in Acts, also shows us that the guidance of God was both necessary and a privilege.

So God's guidance is not something unusual, something that is only for a special group of Christians. It is actually one of those things that make up the inheritance of all those who belong to Christ. If we love Him, we should expect His guidance. It is His promise to us. The Christian life is a direct, personal relationship with God. As we live in the enjoyment of this relationship we'll take pleasure in speaking to Him, and we'll also listen while He speaks to us through guidance. So guidance is an everyday part of our lives.

Digging Deeper

1. What do you think are the main ways which God uses to guide us?

2. Find appropriate Scripture to support each of these:

2. How God speaks

We know what it means to speak to God. Every time we pray, although there's nothing we can see with our physical eyes, we believe and know that God is listening and waiting to answer. It's when we think of this fellowship in the opposite direction that problems arise. We speak with words to express our thoughts and desires. How does God speak, though?

The answer is that He doesn't use words that we hear, but rather an inner conviction that is placed in us by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is our teacher. God guides us through His Spirit in our hearts. As John 16 verse 13 tells us: "...when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth."

We can know this personally sometimes when a special truth about God or about what we ought to do, hits us at a certain time. The important thing for us is that we should be ready to recognise the voice of God.

Thinking It Through

1. What would you do if the advice of your friends conflicted with your own convictions?

 2. Would it ever be possible for your conscience to fail?
-

3. Where God speaks

We consider now some of the channels through which guidance comes to us, leading to that inner conviction.

In the time before Christ, God appointed definite channels – there was the Temple, the priests and the prophets. An interesting list of some of the methods of guidance God used in the Old Testament is given in 1 Samuel 28:6: “Saul...inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets.”

What, though, are the channels for our New Testament times? In other words, **where** do we go to “inquire of the Lord”?

a. The Holy Scriptures

The Bible forms the basis for our guidance. Through it we come to a general knowledge of God’s will and purpose. So we don’t receive special guidance for an urgent need.

Some Christians believe this, however. If in trouble they flip open their Bibles to any page, and from that page they try to squeeze out guidance from God. This is wrong. Rather, we should see our Bible reading as giving us the **framework** for all guidance. Someone once told a story of a believer, using this flipping-the-Bible-open guidance, who placed his finger down on this sentence about Judas, “Then he went away and hanged himself” (Matt.27:5). Realising that this couldn’t be the right guidance for him, he flipped over to another part. There he read, “Go and do likewise (Luke 10:38).”

If we are in doubt concerning the decision that we should take we have to check up on the principles laid down in the Bible. We shouldn’t trust our feelings above God’s Word. Whose fault is it if we get lost on the way to a friend’s place because we haven’t bothered to read the letter from our friend, which gives us the way to get to their place? Instructions for the journey from earth to heaven have been given in outline in God’s Word, the Bible. They are also concisely conveyed to us in our Confessional Statements, which provides the right framework for guidance from God’s Word.

b. The Christian Fellowship

The Church is ‘the fellowship of the Spirit’. If believers stay in the unity of mutual love the Spirit will give guidance through the fellowship that He has created and made his home.

This He will do, firstly, through ‘the ministry of the Word’. In the public reading of the Scripture and the preaching of the Word, God ‘speaks’ to those who come to Him in worship. So we should listen to the sermon in order that we may be spoken to by God. The sermon is not spiritual entertainment because it gives us practical instructions. Many times Christians have found the guidance they need through listening to the sermon.

Secondly, God speaks to us through our fellowship and Bible study groups, Catechism classes, and Youth Club. When we meet together like this, and also as we pray in these groups, we can be given God’s guidance.

c. The Advice Of Others

God can also guide through the advice of other Christians more advanced in the faith. It’s not good to ignore the help of those who have great experience and wisdom. There is probably somebody in your church or among your friends to whom you feel you could go for this kind of help. For example, Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians was written partly in reply to certain questions the Church had sent him. The Corinthians needed guidance on some things that were worrying them, so they asked Paul.

This shows an important New Testament principle; that God speaks to people through people. We have to have a high respect for the advice of our ministers and other mature believers. Yet at the same time we have to realise that no one is perfect, and that ultimately we must look to God for His will through His Word and His Spirit.

d. The Circumstances Of Life

The Holy Spirit may use the outward circumstances of life to guide us. A door or opportunity may clearly be opened before us. Or, negatively, the shutting of a door may equally clearly settle a problem. Acts 16 shows this when Christ’s Spirit would not allow Paul and his fellow missionaries into a certain area, while later they received a vision to lead them into Europe.

Digging Deeper

In 1st Samuel 28 there is the story of Saul seeking guidance for his future. Read the first eight verses. Here Saul is certainly seeking guidance. What could possibly be wrong with that?

4. Which God speaks

a. Direct Impulse Of The Holy Spirit

We have seen above different ways, such as the Scriptures or a Christian friend, in which the Holy Spirit guides us. But the Holy Spirit doesn't restrict Himself to these channels. There may be a prompting or leading which one can receive.

This guidance, however, should not be sought after - it is very rare. And the best preparation that we can have for this is a humble spirit and a devoted heart. But we especially have to test these 'impulses' by our Bibles and our commonsense. We cannot let our feelings run away with us, as 1 John 4:1 says: "...test the spirits to see whether they are from God..."

b. Conscience and Commonsense

The Holy Spirit has given us all common grace so that we know what is right and wrong. We do not need to kneel down to ask God whether it's right for us to steal!

There are some Christians who believe that we have to have a 'blank mind' and 'listen to God', and then He will reveal His will in such a way, that plans for the day can be taken down in detail. We have already seen what the Bible says about guidance. So we have to be very suspicious of any suggested 'methods' that avoid basic Biblical principles. There are no short cuts to guidance, just as there are no short cuts to either salvation or holiness.

We need to have a humble and teachable spirit so that we can be willing to learn from Gods' way of guiding. It's no use rushing into things and expecting God to be with you. You need to first check to see that what you are about to do is the right thing.

Thinking It Through

You have been offered an important new post, and you need to give your decision within 24 hours. What would you do?

5. What God Speaks

Guidance is needed by the Christian in two ways. We need to see this, otherwise we confuse them altogether. The first of these is general guidance. This relates to the whole of life. Here we see that the whole plan of our life is tying in with God's loving control. But, secondly, there is also a need for particular guidance. Sometimes we are in a situation where we need to make a decision within a very short time. Then **how** can you know God's will?

We will take those principles we've just looked at and apply them to a particular problem. A difficult decision has to be made, or a perplexity resolved. What do you do?

1. Begin with **prayer**. Tell God all about your difficulty in detail, and ask for his guidance. Keep that prayerful attitude so that God is in close touch with you and you with Him.

2. **Think** out the whole situation as much as you can. Use Scripture and all the other available information, as well as using your own mind. God gave us minds to use. That's important because when God guides us, He guides us **beyond** the best that human judgement and commonsense can do. He does not ignore our minds but simply goes farther.

3. Having prayed and thought through the next step is to **ask the advice** of a wise and trusted Christian friend. Your friend will know the details of your situation as well as you do, but he might be aware of how God has worked before in similar situations. But don't regard his or her advice as final. What they say must match up with God's Word.

4. While you are waiting, and deciding, still **carry on with your normal work**. If we're sincere in claiming that we're willing to do God's will in a matter that's causing us some worry, then we must also be doing His will in smaller and more obvious things closer at hand. As Luke 16:10 says: "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much..."

For example, a young man who is puzzled as to whether God is calling him to Bible College is not to spend all his time puzzling, but rather he must continue working hard for the kingdom of God in his own church and neighbourhood. It is an important principle of Scripture that God gives future guidance only as we act in obedience upon that which has already been received.

5. It may eventually be found that the Spirit gives a **gentle urge** in a certain direction. Perhaps a door clearly opens, or perhaps it just as clearly closes. Or there is a deepening inner conviction of a line of action to be taken. This is enough to show the next step. As that next step is taken, the way will gradually, step by step, open out. There will be an increasing sense of confidence, which leads us to see that guidance is easier to see when we look back than when we look forward'.

6. At some point along the line definite action must be taken. We are seeking the mind and will of God, but we come to a point where we ourselves must ‘make up our mind’. Acts 16:10 says this when it tells us: “After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, **concluding** that God has called us to preach the gospel to them.”

When you have made your decision, act upon it, and don’t reconsider it. Trust in God and His grace to see you right through. It’s possible that you may not fully realise how definitely you were guided until much later.

Digging Deeper

1. Read Proverbs 3, the verses 5 till 8. How would you use these words to counter someone who believes their common sense is enough to help them?
2. What would you advise is the right perspective to knowing the way ahead?

6. Who speaks

Guidance is such an intimate part of the whole Christian life that it must not be separated from the other aspects of life that we have seen in our previous topics.

Bible Reading, Prayer, Personal Discipline and Guidance form a unity. The guided Christian is the praying Christian. So, too, discipline is necessary for those who want to obtain the greatest spiritual enrichment from Bible reading.

This brings us to what is the highest truth concerning the guidance of the believer. As we go on with God we gradually develop the mind of Christ, talking about things His way and making decisions as He would make them.

We know that when we live with someone, such as our parents or brothers or sisters, or a flat-mate, they begin to influence the way we think and the way we do things. In the same way, we need to have our Lord Jesus, by His Word and Spirit, live in us. As the Spirit is allowed to have control, He will form in us the mind of Christ, until it is Christ within us making the decisions and directing our lives.

What an aim! Then we will be able to say more and more, with Paul: “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal.2:20). Here is the truth in 1 Corinthians 2:16, again in the words of the apostle, “we have the mind of Christ.”

Thinking It Through

1. How can we misuse the Bible in seeking God’s guidance?
2. What, then, is the right use of the Bible in seeking God’s guidance?

Vital Fellowship

1. Who It's All About

Many of you will have read, or at least heard of, the story of Robinson Crusoe. This story is an exciting picture of the kind of life a resourceful man can have for a long time, in complete isolation. To be a Robinson Crusoe Christian, however, is just not possible. Christian fellowship is not something that we can choose whether or not to be part of. Rather, to be a Christian is to share the common life of the Body of Christ.

The early chapters of the Book of Acts show us the life of the first Christian community. "All the believers were together and had everything in common." They prayed together, worked together, and even shared their possessions. The Holy Spirit who had come in great power upon them created 'the fellowship (koinonia) of the Holy Spirit'. This fellowship showed itself in their sharing together a common, community life.

Our Lord Jesus had already taught His disciples that they were connected to Him like branches to a vine, and because the branches were all linked to the same vine they were also linked to each other. The life they received from Christ was the life they themselves shared. That's why the basis for this connection was and is Christ's command, which is: "As I have loved you, so you must love one another." (Jn 15:12)

The Apostles develop this teaching of Jesus, except that they describe it in different ways. One example that some of you will know is the way that Paul describes us as being different parts of the one body. Christians are to be connected together as closely as are the different parts of the body.

It is this unity of believers in Christ which is symbolised best in the fellowship meal, the Holy Supper, in which, as we're told in 1 Corinthians 10:17: "Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf."

Thus we see that the New Testament knows nothing of the Christian who doesn't have anything to do with anyone else. When someone says, "I believe in keeping to myself", they are not following the Christian way of life. To reject "togetherness" is to reject Christ, for we cannot be reconciled to God through Him without at the same time being reconciled to one another. Therefore, the purpose of God is the creation of a new community, a holy nation, and a royal priesthood – the church. So fellowship is not just a part of the Christian life – it is the Christian life.

Digging Deeper

1. How would you respond to someone who said, "My religion is a personal matter between God and myself."
2. Show from Scripture that the purpose of the Lord Jesus was indeed the creation of a new community:

2. Where It's All About

If Christians are to follow God's purpose, and fellowship together, then they must meet together. This gathering together of Christians in one place is the local church. The local church is the Universal Church in that particular place. For example, Paul when writing to the Corinthian church says, "To the Church of God in Corinth."

The best definition of a church is found in what Jesus Christ tells us in Matthew 18:20: "For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them." The real presence of Christ is given to believers gathered together in His Name. We meet together in His Name, because there we meet Christ. This is the main reason why we should "not give up meeting together".

In our modern age there are many people who say they belong to the Church Universal, but don't go to their local church. So they say, "I'm a Christian alright, but you don't need to go to church to show your faith!"

But this position is completely silly. What would be said to a potential sailor who said, "I'm keen to belong to the Navy, but I refuse to be put on a ship!?" We belong to the whole Church, triumphant in heaven, militant on earth, through the local church. We belong to our local church because "togetherness" is the Divine will and purpose.

Christians gather together for three reasons:

a. For Worshipping Him

The Christian fellowship has been created to worship God. The worship, which is acceptable to God, is made by a redeemed community, made one by faith in its Head, Jesus Christ. Even when you worship in the quiet and peace of your own room you're still worshipping 'with all saints' as a member of the community of Christ.

Where does this worship find its highest expression? The answer is in the public worship of God's people. There we gather together to receive the means of grace - through His Word and the sacraments. This is at the same time fellowship with God and with one another through Christ.

Because we gather together before Him the scriptural mandate is fulfilled which tells us 'to offer up' spiritual worship. The Church is then a foretaste of what it will be eternally - the worshipping community.

A Christian who means business will always be at Church twice on Sunday and also joins in with other fellowships, and yes, even Youth Club! And as we're involved in these things we shouldn't expect to get something, but we must offer ourselves totally to God, to listen obediently to His written and spoken word, to pray for others, to have fellowship with God and with our fellow-believers.

b. For Mutual Help

Just as we say earlier in Paul's illustration of the different parts of the body being dependent on each other, we too, as Christians, need one another. We have to build each other up with love.

Christians help one another most by sharing their knowledge and experience of Christ. As Paul said to Philemon, "I pray that you may be active in sharing your faith, so that you will have a full understanding of every good thing we have in Christ."

Sharing your faith means, not telling everything, but it's a willingness to tell our fellow-Christians of our triumphs, our temptations, our problems, and sometimes of our faults and sins. As James 5:16 says, "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed." If we have wronged the fellowship we should confess and seek the forgiveness of our fellow-members.

But there's also the positive side. We are also to share our knowledge of Christ and of our faith. This is best done in fellowship groups. Fellowship around the Scriptures, especially when each member of the group makes some contribution, is very enriching. We have a huge history of Christian knowledge to talk about, and also to help us apply God's Word to the modern age.

c. For Service Together

If there were a thousand soldiers fighting on their own, they would be very confused. But if these soldiers were united and welded together into one striking force that would be something powerful. Christians have to do the same.

Christians together make up the Body of Christ. But that doesn't mean that the church can only work when and where Christians are visibly gathered together. A loyal Christian in a factory is doing Church work, for he's there as a member of the fellowship with its plans and strategy behind him.

Digging Deeper

1. Read Hebrews 10, the verses 19 till 25. This passage tell us we are to meet together. But how does it reach that conclusion?
2. If fellowship is so vital to the Christian life, what happens to the Christian who simply cannot participate in it? (e.g. a soldier in the army)
3. How would you respond to someone who said, "I can be just as good a Christian without going to church?"

3. How It's Lived Out

Christian fellowship is a creation of the Holy Spirit, but as we've already seen He works through human obedience and co-operation. So fellowship is not automatic. It can even be distorted and destroyed by human obedience. That's why Paul says in Ephesians 4:3, "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."

So we cannot take fellowship for granted. Each of us has to go out of our way to build each other up in truth, unity, peace and love.

What qualities do we need to have this unity and love in the fellowship? In fact there's only one quality needed. This quality is 'agape' (Christian) love. This love is the spirit of the Christian community, the mortar that binds together all the living stones of the new temple. Through 'agape' love comes all the fruit of the spirit. We'll now have a look at some parts of this fruit.

a. Loyalty

Just as one of the main ingredients in marriage is faithfulness, so too we must be faithful to other Christians. This applies especially to the tongue. Never gossip about fellow Christians, or put the Church down before unbelievers.

b. Honesty

We have to 'speak the truth in love'. Truth clears away all suspicion and the health of the Body of Christ depends on it. But it must be spoken 'in love'. We cannot be blunt to the point of rudeness. For example, 'that's a horrible haircut Suzie!' Jesus Christ was always honest, yet He never offended.

c. Responsibility

We cannot just sit in our pews on Sunday and do nothing. We must assume our responsibility; we have to be active in God's kingdom, instead of passive.

d. Co-operation

A football team depends on co-operation. The players have to use each other; they have to pass the ball around. In the same way we have to be aware of how other people are different. We can't have that view that says, "If I can't have my way, then...!"

Instead, we have to be humble. As Philippians 2:3 says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves"

e. Patience and Forgiveness

There's a saying that goes,
To dwell above with saints we love
Oh, that will be glory
But to live below with the saints we know...
Well...that's another story!

It can be hard getting on with others in the church. That's why we need patience and forgiveness. Try to appreciate the difficulties of others. Pray for those you don't like, and try to help them if possible.

f. Humour

It's important that we have a sense of humour. But it has to be the right sort of humour so that we laugh with others, not against others. And it's good to be able to laugh with others at yourself. There's no need to take everything seriously. That's why God gave us humour.

Thinking It Through

What do you believe should be the main functions of the Christian Church?

4. Which Way It Works Out

When a stone is thrown into a still pond the ripples move outward in ever-widening circles. This is a picture of Christian fellowship, which can be seen in the form of circles falling within one another.

The outermost circle is the Church Universal. This not only includes all believers now living upon earth, but also those who are now with Christ in heaven. We have to always remember that we're part of one big fellowship and to recognise the needs of our world-wide Church in our prayers.

The next circle inside is the local Church. This is the local assembly of believers who owe a common allegiance to Christ and who are united in His worship and work.

The inner circle is found within every local Church. These are the ones who are really involved in making the Church work. It's a pity in a way because the whole of the local Church should be keen, but unfortunately it's usually left up to a few to do everything.

We should all aim to move towards the centre of these circles so that we're involved as much as we can in God's kingdom. It's when we do this that we can have a really close fellowship with close friends united in Christ in a common faith, love and purpose.

Thinking It Through

Is there any difference between fellowship and friendship?

5. What You Do To Bring It About

We're now going to have a look at how we can retrieve that close fellowship with God and with each other.

a. Prayer

When we pray we share a real unity and we are also supported through it by God. When we pray we should worship God, ask requests for the members of the group we're in, and also intercede for others, not in our group.

b. Silence

It's a good thing when discussing questions of plans to give time for quiet thought, and meditation. Don't be afraid of plenty of silence.

c. Sharing of Experience

Here we can share both our happy moments and our sad times. Here also we can acknowledge some of the wrong things that we've done and how we've learned from them. That way we help each other grow.

d. Study

This we see in our fellowship groups where we study Christian material together and share out thoughts that come from it.

e. Personal Evangelism

We in our groups should always try to win others for Christ. So time should be spent planning the next steps, seeking guidance on persons to be approached and so on.

f. Service

A group has to see how it can help those within the group and outside of it. Perhaps we may be able to help the handicapped, or visit a lonely old person.

g. Hospitality

The home can be used as a base. We may be able to organise a get together of the neighbours during which time we can show our Christianity. Perhaps we may even just invite the neighbour over for a cuppa.

h. Daily Work

We always have to be aware of how we as Christians are to act in the jobs that we have.

i. Church

Perhaps we may be able to help make more of an effort in our local Church?

Jesus, in His High Priestly prayer in John 17 says, "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Let's all co-operate to fulfil this prayer of our Lord, so that by the quality of our love, fellowship and unity, unbelievers will say, "Yes, you can tell they're Christians by their love!"

Digging Deeper

1. Take each of the above nine parts to what we do to bring fellowship about, find scriptural proof for each of them, and share some personal examples illustrating it:
 - a. Prayer
 - b. Silence
 - c. Sharing of Experience
 - d. Study
 - e. Personal Evangelism
 - f. Service
 - g. Hospitality
 - h. Daily Work
 - i. Church
-

8. Witnessing Faith

I. What The Lord Has For Us To Do

When our Lord Jesus Christ called Peter and Andrew to be His disciples, He did it saying, "Come, follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." (Matt 4:19)

In calling them, the Master had a definite job for them to do. They were to leave their fishing on the Sea of Galilee, so that, from then on, they would "from now on catch men" (Luke 5:10)

Together with Peter, Andrew, and the rest of the Apostles, we have been called to follow Christ to do that same thing. The command and commission of Him to whom all authority in heaven and on earth has been given is, "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations." This is the word of the Lord Jesus to every believer. And as we do this work we will indeed be blessed.

But when the Lord Jesus called His disciples from catching fish to catching men, He didn't assume that they already knew how to win others. He said, "Come...and I will make you fishers of men".

Fishing is an art, which must be learned. Already they had learned the technique of fishing with nets in Galilee; now they were to learn, from the Master Himself at work, how to help in converting. Just as actual fishing is an art that involves a certain technique, so also winning people for Christ is an art involving a technique.

Digging Deeper

1. Read Matthew 4:12-25. Imagine yourself as Simon Peter or Andrew, or James or John. What are you wondering about this Jesus who has called you?
 2. How is that Christian love we have different than other types of love? (e.g. the love you have for a friend?)
 3. What are some of the things that prevent us from trying to win others for Christ?
-

2. Why It's Us The Lord Does It Through

First of all, it is important to make clear the fact that people cannot be won for Christ just by using a particular method. It all depends on the person using it. And the necessary qualifications of the personal worker are simple but also demanding. You need a real love for the Lord Jesus Christ, and a real love for ordinary men and women. This is what Paul is describing in 1 Corinthians 13 when he says, "If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing (v.3)." Love, which is that special love of Jesus, is the important thing in witnessing. Your technique, no matter how good it may seem, is useless without that love.

Mind you, we need to combine this love together with wise, tactful method. If we really love the ordinary men and women for whom Christ died, we'll be most zealous to know how to win them. In this situation technique becomes a way of showing that love.

Why do we so often fail to do this work of witnessing? One of the main reasons is because we have little love. And the only way we get this love is to pray for it, and then act on the assumption that we have it. You'll find in action that you do have it. It's only in sharing our faith that our faith becomes more real to us. Love will overcome all the other obstacles that hold us back from doing this.

Let's consider, though, these obstacles:

- 1) There is laziness. The cure for that is action. Very definite and practical action.
- 2) Then there's natural shyness and reserve, especially the fear of being told off. This may be because of your pride or your nature, or both. The cure is to do all the time that thing you don't like doing. The young preacher may often be afraid when he faces the congregation. But he doesn't bolt!

Mind you, for each one of us there will be certain carefulness. In fact, it would be dangerous if we didn't feel like that.

There's also a natural fear of making mistakes. Yet "the man who never makes mistakes never makes anything".

- 3) Finally we might hold back because we don't feel up to doing it. We may feel ignorant of the Scriptures and the Christian faith. We may feel morally unworthy, aware of our own weaknesses. We may feel incompetent; "I cannot speak, I'm only a child". Of course, it is true that, on our own, we are not up to it. But mercifully our task isn't to speak of ourselves, but Jesus as Lord.

If we wait until we are up to it, the world will perish. But of course, it means we allow the Spirit to make us more able. The only way to cure ignorance of the Bible is to study it; the only way to speak effectively is to practice; the only way to get rid of our falling to the traps of sin around us is to make ourselves holy to God, and live obediently. Remember, He has said, "I will make you fishers of men".

Digging Deeper

1. "Winning others for Christ requires a special gift, and so it's not everybody's job." True?
 2. Which Bible verses prove the way that you answered the question above?
 3. How would you attempt to gain the confidence of another person?
-

3. Who The Lord Wants Us To Do That To

The process of winning someone for Christ can be divided roughly into two parts. First, there's the winning of their friendship and confidence. And second, there's leading them into a committed relationship with Christ as Saviour and Lord. In other words, woo and win.

We'll describe these two phases in turn. And to help us remember them we'll describe wooing by making use of five words all beginning with the letter 'I', and winning by using five words beginning with the letter 'C'. By doing this we'll be looking, in order, at the main principles involved in evangelism work.

a. Intention

One of the biggest reasons why so many Christians don't win others for their Lord is that they have no serious intention to do it. So it's necessary at this beginning to be very clear on this point: Do I seriously intend to devote myself in attempting to win others for Christ?

Without this fixed and settled intention nothing is going to happen. But with this "single steady aim" all difficulties will be overcome, and all opportunities exploited.

It's of little value to make some vague general resolution to win others for Christ. Something more definite and explicit is required. Think about this resolve: I will try to win the friendship and confidence of every person with whom I become acquainted, in order to lead that person to Christ Jesus.

If you think, like the Psalmist, that 'it is too high, I cannot attain to it', then this is another way of forming the right intention: Think of the name of the person(s) you should attempt to win, and then (on your knees) form the serious intention of winning that person, however long it may take.

Apart from a definite rejection of Christ by the friend you are attempting to win, be prepared to persist in your intention, like the Good Shepherd who 'seeks until He finds'.

b. Intercession

The Holy Spirit alone can win any person for the Lord Jesus Christ, for only He can move someone from death to life. Only He can scatter the darkness of the believer's night and make 'the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ' to shine in someone's heart and mind. We depend completely on the work of the Holy Spirit. As we are wise in our personal work we're recognising this fact. The Spirit must prepare the soil or the seed is sown in vain.

But this work of the Holy Spirit is done by Him through us. As we depend on Him, so too He depends on our cooperation. And our cooperation with the Holy Spirit is through prayer, by which His life giving energies are made to work in the life of our friend. So the second

c. Initiative

The next step is to go to our friend. We must take the initiative and get in close touch with him. The Divine Sower went out to sow His seed (Matthew 13: 3). The Good Shepherd went after that which was lost. He didn't sit in the fold and wait for the sheep to come to Him. We must take the initiative. It's not a matter of "the church doors are open on Sunday if they want to come in."

This point is very basic. Nothing will happen unless we make a start in talking with them, making friends with them, going where they are. Naturally, we must do this while being careful to avoid bad influences upon ourselves.

Often we find ourselves already in touch with unbelievers in the home, at work or school, in social life. But sometimes we need to make contact. We have to be courageous in doing this. We must be ready to ignore our shyness, and our fear of being told off, and take risks for Christ's sake.

d. Identification

Our Lord Jesus Christ not only came to seek us, but He also became one with us, apart from sin. We must also identify ourselves with those we're attempting to win. The apostle Paul described it, "Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who...made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant being made in human likeness." (Phil.2:5-7)

Try to stand in the non-Christian's shoes; see life as he sees it. This way you become one in all respects, apart from sin, with the friend.

This is the fundamental principle of personal evangelism. It's also what God did in sending His Son to be born on earth. This is what Paul means, when he says, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some." (1 Cor.9:22)

A minister wanted to win some tramps for his Lord. So he replaced his clothes with the rags of a tramp, and carried a stick like a tramp. Then he went out and shared their life. He walked with them, talked with them, begged for crusts, slept with them, and was even infested with fleas and other crawlies! He became acquainted with the tramps' hardships and sins (which he didn't share), and in this way was able to help save some.

We have to do the same for the one we're attempting to save.

e. Interest

Identification means approaching the unbeliever along the line of his interests, rather than imposing our interests on him. A fish is attracted and caught by the use of bait, which the fish like. And, in the same way, a person's interest is the bait by which he can be attracted.

Of course, you need to be tactful in doing this. But here's an illustration of this: There were some women who had become Christians through a morning coffee fellowship. Yet they, and their Christian friends, couldn't get their husbands to come to church. So some of the men in the church became involved in going to the football with these men, which they did every Saturday. It was through that friendship that the Lord worked to also bring these men into His Kingdom.

Often we ask the question: "But what can I talk about with him, or her?" Here is the answer; find out their interests, and encourage them to talk about those things. And, as long as they are hobbies we can become involved in, then we should go and share that with them.

Thinking It Through

1. What is the place in our personal work of:
 - (a) prayer?
 - (b) the Bible?
 - (c) the Church?
2. Is it possible to do anything for an unbeliever who's simply not interested?

4. How The Lord Does It Through You

So far, we've described five stages in winning the friendship and confidence of a non-Christian. We'll now assume that this has been done, and go on to ask how this friend can now be led into a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord. Here the five steps will be described by using the letter 'C' at the beginning of each point.

a. Confidence

In using this word, we're not adding anything new. We're simply summing up all that's been achieved so far. By having that outgoing love and friendship which we've just looked at, it's possible to win the believer's confidence and trust. You shouldn't speak about Jesus until this has been done. Make friends first, and the natural human friendship will be the channel through which the other is brought to Christ.

The Farmer prepares the soil before he sows the seed. In the same way the soil of the human heart is softened up by natural friendship and prayer before the seed of testimony to Christ is sown in it.

Winning someone's confidence doesn't happen straight away. It might take twenty minutes, or five months, or even five years. But, however long it takes; we must make it our first aim, and avoid the cold, impersonal 'hit or miss' type of evangelism.

And you can tell when you have the confidence of your friend. One of the best ways to gain that confidence (as well as those already mentioned) is to show genuine appreciation of the good qualities of the friend.

On the other hand, the quickest way to lose it is to criticise or condemn his faults. That's why there's the rule – commend, but never condemn.

A Christian was once offered a drink of whisky by a drunk in a railway compartment. When he refused he didn't condemn that man for his wrong, but said, "I think you are a very generous fellow". He won that man over to Christ.

b. Confession

Now the critical time has come when an opportunity is to be found to sow the seed itself. By seed is meant the word of testimony to our Lord Jesus Christ.

This seed can be sown by the right use of conversation. It's important to remember that the seed is the word of testimony, not of argument. No man was ever argued into the Kingdom.

This arguing happens if the Christian insists on giving 'views', rather than 'news'. 'Views' are always a matter of opinion and dispute. Give news, not views.

The news the Christian is called to share with his friend is the 'good news'. So, the Gospel – the story of what God has done 'once for all' in the life, saving death and glorious resurrection of His Son Jesus Christ. The Christian must lead his friend to the Cross of Calvary and to the Risen Lord whatever the starting-point of the conversation.

This starting point will always be given by your friend's conversation or circumstances, his needs or particular problems. As every person is unique, it's impossible to map out a course or to describe the way along which everyone must come to personally know Jesus.

There are, though, three practical suggestions:

- (i) Very often the move from ordinary friendly conversation to talking about the things of Christ can be made by asking a simple question. This depends, naturally, on the person involved, and on the previous conversation. So it won't come out of the blue.

But unless the Christian takes the initiative in asking a personal question, the conversation isn't likely to lead anywhere. The asking of the question is always the crisis point in personal contact.

We need to be direct here. And one good question to ask is: "Suppose that you were to die tonight and stand before God, and He were to say to you, 'Why should I let you enter my heaven?', what would you say?"

- (ii) Following on from asking such a question, the Christian must know how to present the way of salvation in a simple, clear manner. You need to be able to tell your friend what the Lord Jesus has done for him, giving a basic explanation of the cross, and the offer of a present Living Lord and Saviour. You also need to show your friend what Jesus requires of him. This, of course means some knowledge of the New Testament, especially the most relevant passages.
- (iii) You should be able to add to the testimony of Scripture your own experience, if that's helpful. Speaking from your heart like this helps to reach your friend, especially when you use your experience to tie in with their situation.

c. Conviction

All this is entirely the work of the Holy Spirit. As John describes it: "When he comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgement." (John 16:8).

It's wrong for us to make direct attempts at producing conviction. That would be taking over the work of the Holy Spirit, who alone can convict a man of sin and of his need of a Saviour. The Holy Spirit does this work as the unbeliever is pointed to the Saviour, for it's only against the background of the saving love of God that the true nature of sin can be seen and felt. The Christian's duty is like that of John the Baptist, who pointed to the Saviour saying: "Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world." (John 1:19)

It must not be forgotten, however, that the Spirit does this work through the Scriptures and the word of testimony of the believer. The cutting and painful 'sword of the Spirit' is the Word of God. Here again the right use of Scripture is of decisive importance. The believer through that can be helped to see the true nature of his sin.

For a start he'll think that he's an average 'decent' person, who needs forgiveness only for his 'sins'. These he sees, as being those wrong things that he's aware of doing. But he must be brought to an awareness of his SIN. He has to see that his total 'wrongness' is his 'apartness from God', his rejection of the Divine love offered in Jesus Christ.

You can help your friend to see that the real nature of sin is pride, distance from God, self-sufficiency, and rebellion. And also show him how he can stand against these things, by concentrating directly on the marvellous love and grace of God in Jesus Christ.

d. Conversion

You need to also explain to your friend that he can only become a Christian if he really means it. It's not a matter of just walking to the front at a Crusade. Something has to be done. Or rather, someone must be received. It might help him if you explain it this way: A Christian is a person who has met God in Christ, and trusts Him as Saviour and obeying Him as Lord.

The actual word 'conversion' means a complete turn around. No longer do we go the way we were going before. No longer are we chasing after those things that we want to. Instead, we're walking the Lord's path, with His Spirit to guide us. No longer are we on our own.

e. Continuance

Having been turned around, and so, facing a new direction, our new Christian friend needs help. A mother doesn't bring a baby into the world, and then hope for the best. If she leaves it to take care of itself, it dies. To help bring someone to Christ, and then to leave him to take care of himself is one of the cruelest acts you can do. You need to take full responsibility for your baby in Christ. See that he gets food and nourishment, fresh air and exercise.

First, this means you should encourage and teach him habits of daily prayer and Bible reading straightaway. Start him reading the Gospels, give him some practical advice about daily prayers, and keep him at it. You can use the lesson we've done on Bible reading and prayer for this.

Second, he must be joined up, also straightaway, with the Christian Fellowship. Take him along with you to church, introduce him to the Youth club and other Christians, and see that he's invited out to different people's homes. So we need to tie him into the Christian community.

Third, encourage him to witness to others, to attempt to win his own friends, and to take up some Christian service.

So that he can do all these things keep in close fellowship with him. Pray for him. Don't relax or let go until Christ becomes formed in him.

In conclusion we have to be aware of possible misunderstanding that might come from this study. We've been analysing and describing ten stages of winning another for Christ, so that we can understand the process better. But of course there's no clear-cut or rigid separation between these stages. One flows into another. Don't go into this task with the thought, "I must do this, and then this, and then this". Rather it's all the one united dynamic movement of love.

Christ won us by love. A love revealed in His life, poured out for our salvation in His death, triumphant in His resurrection. That love alone seeks and saves men, but it must operate through us. Love - the love of Christ - is the key that opens the door of the human heart. Love is our wisdom and insight. Love is our tact or "touch". Love is our dynamic and motive. As Paul describes it, "For Christ's love compels us." (2 Cor 5: 14)

Putting It Into Practice

1. Someone suddenly asks you: "I want to become a Christian. What do I have to do?" Now, how would you answer?

 2. Look up Romans 12:1-8. Which different kinds of services do these verses show that you can become involved in? Are there any other avenues? Which texts show them?
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