



Nazarene Discipleship International (NDI)

**Adult Ministries**

**Lessons for Men 2023**

**By Ángel Rodríguez Gómez**  
Mesoamerica Region

# LESSONS FOR MEN 2023

Ángel Rodríguez Gómez

Church of the Nazarene  
Mesoamerica Region



Adult Ministries

Title: ***Lessons for Men 2023***  
Study Guide for Men

Authors: *Ángel Rodríguez Gómez & Patricia Rodríguez*  
Design: B. Patricia Rubio de Rodríguez

Material produced by: The Church of the Nazarene, Mesoamerica Region.  
Nazarene Discipleship International

Published and distributed: NDI, Mesoamerica Region.

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## **Presentation**

Nazarene Discipleship International (NDI) is organized by developing Adult Ministries, Youth Ministries, and Children's Ministries.

This material is part of the Ministry among Adults, and its objective is to help the members of the Church of the Nazarene to know biblical teaching and to put it into practice in their daily lives, in order to grow like Jesus Christ.

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

### ***A. Spiritual area:***

- To motivate men to consecrate themselves under the direction of the Holy Spirit.
- To do personal evangelism with other people.
- To strengthen their worship of God and devotional life.

### ***B. Ministerial area:***

- To recognize that men have the responsibility for the preservation and growth of God's work.
- To work on personal, family and church building.
- To facilitate the service of men in the church.

### ***C. Personal and family area:***

- To apply biblical principles and values to men's personal Christian lives.
- To build their homes on the principles and values of the Kingdom of God manifested in the Bible.
- To apply biblical principles and values to good marriage relationships.
- To apply biblical principles and values to parenting.

This book contains 12 lessons that can be shared once a month at the men's meetings. Each lesson contains:

### ***Learning objectives.***

They refer to the achievements expected from the student by the end of the study of the lesson

### ***Introduction.***

It's an initial presentation that contextualizes the topic to be addressed in order to help the reader understand the context.

### ***Development of the topic.***

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

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***Conclusion of the main teaching.***

At the end of each lesson, a brief conclusion of what has been learned is provided, which can be used at the end of the class as a closure and in the following session to remember the topics covered.

***Dynamics or activities:***

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

## Lesson 1. **My life plan** *with God in the center*

**Bible Text:** *Prov. 16:1-3 Good News Translation*

*We may make our plans, but God has the last word. You may think everything you do is right, but the LORD judges your motives. Ask the LORD to bless your plans, and you will be successful in carrying them out.*

### **Objectives:**

- **Explain** the importance of developing a Life Project.
- **Determine** at least 7 values that will govern your life.
- **Self-assess** yourself in the various areas of your life as a person

### **1.1 Introduction**

By the grace of God, we begin another year of our lives. It's common and appropriate to set ourselves a series of goals at the beginning of the new year. We usually talk about goals, such as getting a better job or a promotion, advancing in our studies, being a better father, a better husband, and improving our health. In the spiritual realm, we aspire perhaps to advance in our biblical studies, to serve in a better way, to be a better disciple, to win new disciples for the Lord, etc.

However, experience shows that without a plan and without the corresponding evaluation and follow-up, soon those "good intentions" are left aside as the year progresses. For this reason, this year the lessons will focus on helping us establish goals, design strategies, establish activities, and design indicators that allow us to evaluate our progress.

Particularly in this first lesson, we're going to study: What's a Life Plan or Project? What are the benefits of having a life plan? In what areas should we set goals? What are the steps to design a life plan? How can we visualize ourselves over time in each area of personal development?

### **1.2 Development**

#### **1.2.1 What's a life project?**

A life project is a long or medium-term personal plan that's intended to be followed over the years. In it, we set goals and objectives that we intend to achieve over time.

A life project is an important tool for planning the future, which helps us get to know ourselves better and know what we would like to achieve in a few years. This can be influenced by several factors that may appear during this process that could interfere or modify it. (Uni Betas, 2022)

In a similar way that we would do a Strategic Development Plan for an organization, we must start from some initial information:

- The set of values that govern the person who is developing their Life Project. For example, love, forgiveness, respect, etc.
- A list of the skills, gifts, and talents that you have.
- The current context in which the person lives.
- Your current readiness level.

## 1.2.2 Objectives of a life project

Some of the basic objectives sought when developing a Life Project are (Concept, 2022):

- Define clear **objectives and goals** to make the right decisions.
- Establish **what the person wants** for their life.
- Seek the development of **self-knowledge and self-management**.
- **Provide tools** to achieve personal goals.
- **Rediscover personal tastes**, values and abilities.
- Align the **individual's decisions** with their true self.
- **Visualize a future**. What do I want to be like? Where do I want to be? With whom?
- **Focuses the individual's energy** on what they want to achieve.

The life project is usually focused on various areas. For example, a life project can be developed for:

- Studying for a university degree.
- The workplace.
- Forming a marriage or family.
- Serving in some ministry.
- Our personal health

Obviously integrating all this is ideal, but sometimes due to ignorance, lack of time, or not giving it due importance, a more complete plan isn't made in our various areas of life.

## 1.2.3 Steps to establish a Life Project

To develop our Life Project, the following steps can be followed:

### 1) Decide what your great purpose in life is.

For Christians, our great purpose must be to *live lives that are Christlike*. The Bible says that God "predestined (believers) to be conformed to the image of his Son" (Romans 8:29). (Got Question, 2022). Peter Amsterdam (2019) points out that "God's ultimate purpose for us is that we really conform to the image of his Son, both in our persons and in our situations."

Several passages support this:

- Making us like Christ is God's work, and He will see it through to the end (Phil. 1:6).
- "Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did" (1 John 2:6).
- We're to have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. (Phil. 2:5)

- Who can know the mind of the Lord? Who can instruct us? Well, we have the mind of Christ. (1 Cor. 2:16)
- "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you" (John 13:15)

**Being like Christ is a journey, not a destination. The best bit is the journey. *Charles R. Swindoll***

Peter Amsterdam (2019) points out that being more like Jesus requires a two-way effort: we must *put off* sin and *put on* Christ. For its part, the *Blog Got Questions* (2022) establishes that there are three things that contribute to being more like Christ: our surrender to God, our freedom from sin and our spiritual growth.

### **A. Becoming more Christlike is the result of surrendering to God.**

Romans 12:1-2 says that our worship involves total self-dedication to God. We offer our bodies as "living sacrifices," and our minds are renewed and transformed.

When Jesus said, "*Follow me*," Levi immediately left his money tables (Mark 2:14); so, we all must willingly surrender all we have in order to follow the Lord. As John the Baptist said, "*He must become greater; I must become less*" (John 3:30), so we focus more and more on Jesus and His glory, losing ourselves in His will.

### **B. Becoming more Christlike is the result of freedom from sin.**

Since Jesus lived a sinless life, the more we consider ourselves "*dead to sin*" (Romans 6:11) and live a life of purity, the more like Jesus we'll be. By offering ourselves to God, sin is no longer our master, and we're more clearly identified with Christ (Rom. 6:1-14).

Jesus invites us to follow him, and we have His example of obedience (John 15:10), sacrificial love (John 15:12-13), and patient suffering (1 Peter 2:19-23). We also have the examples of the apostles, who followed Christ's example (1 Cor. 11:1).

When it comes to restraining sin in our lives, we have divine help: Praise the Lord for the Word of God (Psalm 119:11), the intercession of Christ (Rom. 8:34; Hebrews 7:25), and the power of the Spirit who dwells in us (Rom. 8:4; Gal. 5:16).

### **C. Becoming more Christlike is the result of Christian growth.**

When we're first saved, we're immature in wisdom and knowledge, and inexperienced in grace and love. But then we can grow. In each of these things, our responsibility is to become stronger and more like Christ. "*But grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ*" (2 Peter 3:18). "*May the Lord make your love increase and overflow for each other and for everyone else...*" (1 Thess. 3:12).

## **2) Establish which principles and values are going to be paramount in your life.**

Principles are rules, regulations, or ordinances. They can also be a law or statute on which we must abide by for our own and common benefit. In this sense, the Ten Commandments are biblical principles that we must obey.

The Lord Jesus also left us many principles to have an adequate Christian conduct. In the Beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount, in his Parables, and in His own life, the Lord Jesus left us a series of biblical principles.

In the case of values, these are guidelines that orient human behavior and the life of each individual, based on principles. "Values are the principles, virtues or qualities that characterize a person, an action or an object that are considered positive or of great importance for a social group" (Cubillan, 2021).

For example, we can set some of the following values:

- Love of God (Matthew 22:34-40)
- Love of neighbor (Matthew 22:34-40).
- Respect (Prov. 1:8).
- Honesty (Prov. 11:3)
- Loyalty (1 Cor. 4:2)
- Confidence (2 Cor. 7:16)
- Humility (Phil. 2:3, James 4:6)
- Service (Matthew 20:28)
- Responsibility
- Forgiveness (Matthew 18:23-35)
- Friendship (Prov. 17:17)
- Generosity (Prov. 11:25)
- Obedience (James 1:25)
- Mercy or kindness. (Acts 22:12,13)
- Tolerance (Col. 3:13)

### 3) Evaluate your current situation in all areas that make up your life.

In this step we can use the tool called "The Wheel of Life", which is used in Coaching. We're going to adapt that tool and we're going to think about what are the priority areas of our life in the various areas of our life. Next, we're going to mention what Michael Hyatt (2018) suggests that we include in our Life Plan.

Scope	How am I today?	How do I rate it? (0 to 100%)
<b>My spiritual life</b>		%
<b>As a spouse</b>		
<b>As parents</b>		
<b>Friendships and social circles</b>		
<b>Professional development</b> (work environment, etc.)		
<b>Physical Health</b>		
<b>Emotional and mental Health</b>		
<b>Finance</b>		
<b>Education</b>		
<b>Recreation/fun</b>		

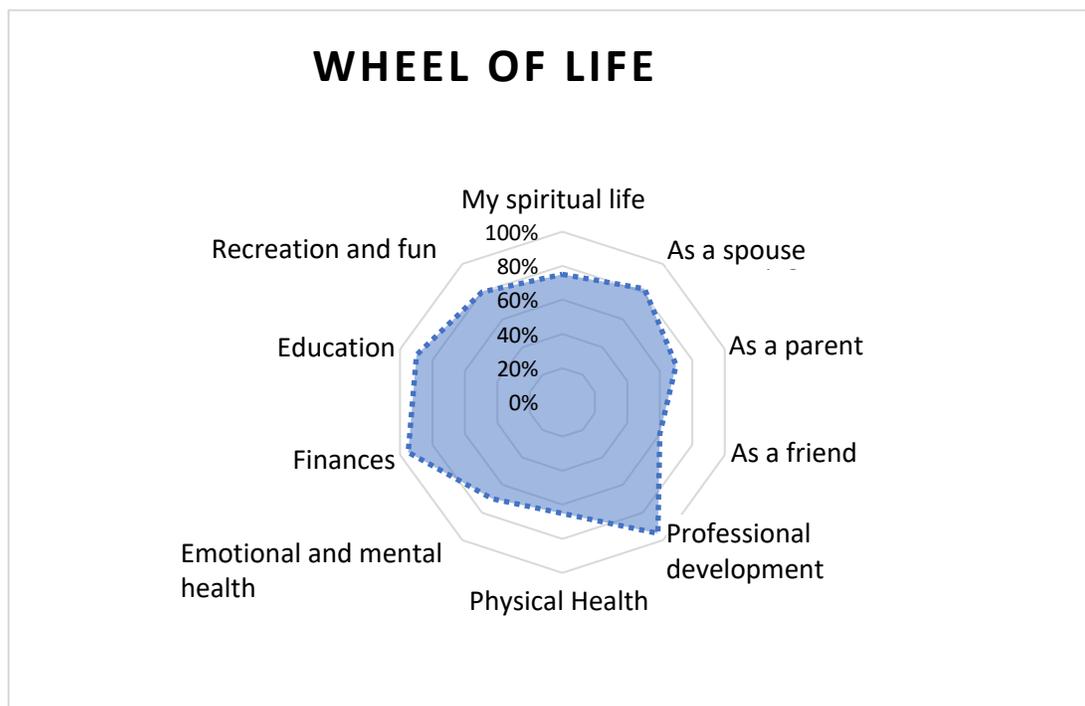
It's important to highlight that you can add areas that you consider to be a priority, but we recommend not removing any of the areas given here. It should be noted that these areas aren't alien to each other. Any area in which you aren't making adequate progress can affect the others. For example, if you have emotional health problems, this can affect your relationship with your partner, your parental relationship, your relationships at the workplace, etc. They can certainly affect your spiritual life as well.

We're going to use the example data given in the previous Table. Suppose the person states that they're satisfied with the percentages given in the last column. So, the figure of the wheel is used to see that progress is being made adequately in each of them. Otherwise, the problems in some areas will greatly affect our growth in the other areas.

To self-assess ourselves in each area of our life (of the 10 mentioned above) you can apply Michael Hyatt's test. Here is the link if you want to do it

<https://assessments.fullfocus.co/lifescore/>

Given the following graph, we see that we'll have difficulty "making it roll" and moving forward in life, because in some cases, one has outstanding peaks (as in the case of professional development), but at the same time it has areas with low development (such as in the case of physical health). Therefore, goals must be designed, with their respective activities, that contribute to harmonious growth.



#### 4) Identify the talents, abilities and gifts that you possess

List everything that God has endowed you with, such as gifts, talents and other abilities. We can also include the trades, professions or skills in which we have been trained.

For example, a person might have the following:

	Description	Observations
<b>Gifts</b>	Spiritual gifts are given to all believers by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 12:3, 6) upon accepting Christ as Savior. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The gifts that I have in particular are teaching, leadership, and generosity.</li> </ul>	My major area of service is teaching. I continued training as an educator, both in education as well as Theology
<b>Talents</b>	Talent can be defined as an innate special or outstanding ability to carry out a specific activity. A talent is perfected with training. Talent is also a personal inclination towards an activity. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>I have some talent to write lessons, articles, and books.</li> <li>I have a talent for planning.</li> <li>I've developed some talent for educational management.</li> </ul>	
<b>Trade or profession.</b>	I have professional training in various areas such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Church Development</li> <li>Family orientation</li> <li>College professor</li> </ul>	

After this, the following steps are carried out. These will be studied in the next lesson.

- Have a Mission and vision for life.
- Set your own goals and objectives.
- Determine what actions you should implement.
- Continually evaluate your progress.
- Make the necessary adjustments.
- Update your life project periodically.

### 1.3 Conclusions

For each of us, it's very important to have a clear purpose in life. Added to this is the exercise of visualizing the desired future in your life. Before going on to determine goals, strategies, activities and budget, we'll need to have a system of Christian values that guide us when we go after our goals.

Let's take the time to do that. That will allow us to focus all our decisions and actions towards the fulfillment of our purpose, which is to be like Christ.

## My commitment to God.

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## Reflection exercises and practical application.

1. Carry out a self-assessment to see how you're doing in the 10 identified areas each person has. You can apply the test made by Michael Hyatt. Here is the link if you want to do it. <https://assessments.fullfocus.co/lifefocus/>

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2. Example, if you identified some characteristics present in you as an absent father, plan to become a present father, who assumes his responsibilities as a father with excellence.

Value	How are you going to demonstrate it?
Love for God (Matthew 22:34-40).	
Love of neighbor (Matthew 22:34-40).	
Respect (Prov. 1:8).	
Honesty (Prov. 11:3)	
Loyalty (1 Cor. 4:2)	
Confidence (2 Cor. 7:16)	
Humility (Phil. 2:3 James 4:6)	
Service (Matthew 20:28)	
Responsibility	
Forgiveness (Matthew 18:23-35)	
Friendship (Prov. 17:17)	
Generosity (Prov. 11:25)	
Obedience (James 1:25 )	
Mercy or kindness. (Acts 22:12,13)	
Tolerance (Col. 3:13)	

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3. Identify those talents, abilities and gifts that you possess.

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## Lesson 2. **Know that you can, *want to be able***

*Bible Text: Jeremiah 29:11*

*"For I know the plans I have for you," declares the LORD, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."*

### **Objectives:**

- **Identify and eradicate** those false beliefs that the enemy has placed in our lives.
- **Increase** our faith in what God has as a purpose for our lives and the extraordinary way in which he helps us achieve it

## **2.1 Introduction**

Before moving on to setting goals in some of the areas of our lives, it will be of utmost importance to stop to recognize that there are many ways in which the enemy will try to oppose us meeting those goals.

In this lesson we're going to see the importance of identifying all those false beliefs that we have been adopting throughout life and that are an impediment to our integral growth. We're also going to study the relevance of encouraging ourselves and those around us. But, above all, let's remember the importance of believing in God's promises for our lives.

## **2.2 Development**

### **2.2.1 Beliefs that take hold as strengths**

Before writing our first goals, it's important to identify how the enemy is an expert at building strengths throughout our lives. Those "fortresses" are like great walls that he builds in our thinking to divert us from the purpose that God has for our life.

Michael Hyatt (2018) shows us an example of how these false beliefs act on us. He describes that his family had a pet dog. To prevent the dog from entering the house, they put a collar on it that emitted a certain current when it approached the door. Thus, the dog learned that he shouldn't approach that door that caused him some slight electric shock. The interesting thing, describes Michael Hyatt, is that over time the collar was removed, but the dog still didn't approach the door. "He had acquired a conditioning reflex that determined his behavior as soon as he didn't approach the door (and therefore, didn't go into the house)".

You may be wondering what this has to do with our lives. Well, now I invite you to think about each of our lives. How many ideas has the enemy planted in our minds that don't allow

us to achieve certain goals? I'm going to list some examples of it, and I invite you to identify some other false beliefs that the enemy has anchored in our thinking.

- I don't imagine that I can have a healthy weight, because I've been overweight all my life.
- Nobody in my family has completed a university degree. I don't think my kids will make it.
- The labor market is highly competitive. It's very difficult for me to get a well-paid job related to the degree I studied.
- I've never won a person to Christ. I'm very shy and I hardly have studies.
- It's useless to try because they don't recognize my effort in my workplace.
- I think my spouse will never change.

**Our beliefs about what is possible have a direct influence on the reality that we experience. But what if you could change your feeling of what is possible?  
Michael Hyatt (2018)**

We must be alert and identify where the messages that are rooting these false beliefs come from.

- It can come from newscasts that highlight only bad news over good news.
- They may be from people we hang out with who have very negative attitudes.
- It can be the social networks that only show us messages where people only show "what is nice," "achievements," etc., which can make us think that we're failures by not having what they have.

## 2.2.2 The Pygmalion effect

In the field of psychology and pedagogy, the Pygmalion effect refers to the fact that the expectations and forecasts of teachers about the way in which students behave in some way is determined precisely because those are the behaviors that teachers expect.

Ana María Gutiérrez (2010) says,

*The Pygmalion effect is a model of interpersonal relationships that figuratively responds to the fact that the expectations we have about the people, things and situations with which we interact tend to come true.*

This was demonstrated through an experiment carried out by Rosenthal and Jacobson, in a school in the United States, which consisted of the following:

- Step 1.** A test was administered to all the students on:
  - a) intelligence,
  - b) personality
  - c) aptitude
- Step 2.** Then, instead of selecting the best, the results were discarded. Groups were created, for which a sample of students was randomly selected.
- Step 3.** Teachers were assigned to groups. They were told which students they expected would have an excellent performance, supposedly because they were the ones who had done better in the applied tests, but it was false.

**Step 4.** At the end of the year and graduation, the students were re-evaluated. The result obtained was surprising. It was found that, in effect, the best students were those from the randomly selected list, which, by the way, were not the best in the initial test.

What made the difference was that during the school year, both the teachers and the students, who were supposed to be the best, behaved in a way that was expected from those who are the best. There was no lack of words of encouragement from the teachers, with the conviction that their students should obtain the best academic performance. The students also psyched themselves up for it, they believed it.

It was then shown that the belief or expectation that one person has about another can influence the performance of said subject.



Patricia Solís and Víctor Borja (2017) point out that to be "positive pygmalions" we must expose positive expectations. They share the following list with us:

- Focus on students' strengths, not their weaknesses.
- Express positive expectations about the student's abilities.
- Listen and pay close attention to the student.
- Emphasize the value of the student.
- The trainer must believe in their own abilities and capacity to have a positive impact on the student's performance.
- Establish and accept, encouraging students, including warmth, attentiveness, smiling, nodding.
- Give students more verbal cues about their performance, more feedback, more praise and positive constructive criticism.
- Encourage students to ask questions.
- Push students to respond to directions. Engage students and use their input when possible.
- Lead by example.
- Reinforce students in a positive way.
- Allow the student time to complete a task correctly.
- Give the student the benefit of the doubt.
- Be generous, with sincere praise.

## 2.2.3 Success stories

### A. The case of Ben Carson.

The movie *Gifted Hands* tells us the true story about the life of neurosurgeon Ben Carson (1951 -) and his struggle to get ahead in a hostile environment. In the early 1960s, Ben had to move to a small poor neighborhood in Michigan with his brother Curtis and his mother Sonya after his father left them.

His mother only studied up to third grade. She had to work two and even three jobs simultaneously to support her two children. Ben Carson experienced difficult school years, being the victim of abuse and racism. At first, he was a very bad student, but his mother knew how to motivate and push him to be a good student and a good man. Despite the fact that Ben went through all kinds of obstacles, he received the following remarkable results:

- He graduated in medicine from one of the most prestigious universities in the United States (Yale University).
- Later, he studied at the University of Michigan Medical School, in the area of neurosurgery.
- He became the first African-American neurosurgical resident at Johns Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore.
- He successfully separated two Siamese twins for the first time, after 22 hours, with a team of 70 people.
- He received the Presidential Medal of Freedom (2008), the highest civilian award in the United States.
- He was a Republican presidential candidate in 2016.
- He was Secretary of Housing and Urban Development of the United States.
- Together with his wife, they established the Carson Study Fund to grant scholarships to students with high academic performance and limited financial resources.
- He has written books such as: *Take the Risk, Think Big, Miracle Hands*, and *The Big Picture*.

### B. The case of Thomas Alva Edison (1847-1931).

Thomas attended school at the age of seven. But his experience lasted only three months, as he was expelled from the classroom. His teacher alleged lack of interest and clumsiness. He additionally suffered from partial deafness that he contracted as a consequence of an attack of scarlet fever.

It's said that one day Thomas's teacher gave him a letter. He asked him to give it to his mother, who was the only one who could read. When he got home, Thomas handed the letter to his mom. With his boyish curiosity, Thomas asked her, "Mom, my teacher gave me this paper; he told me to give it to you and that only you could read it. What does it say?"

The story describes that with eyes full of tears his mother, after reading it to herself, said to him: Thomas the letter says the following "Your son is a genius. This school is too small for him, and we don't have teachers good enough to teach him. Please educate him yourself." After that, his mother devoted herself body and soul to caring for and homeschooling Thomas, who over time, became one of the most important inventors of the century.

Among his more than a thousand inventions, the following stand out:

- At the age of ten, Thomas set up his first laboratory in the basement of his parents' house and taught himself the rudiments of chemistry and electricity.
- He learned how to telegraph and, after getting a cheap second-hand printing press, he began to publish a newspaper on his own
- Edison abandoned his work at the age of twenty-one and decided to become a self-employed inventor, registering his first patent in 1868.
- Shortly afterwards, he succeeded in building an effective stock quote printer.
- At the age of twenty-eight, Thomas chose Menlo Park, a place outside of New York where he built the first research laboratory in the world
- Within his first jobs, he managed to perfect the Bell telephone.
- A year later he invented the phonograph.
- At the age of thirty-two, he dealt with the problem of electric lighting and invented the electric light bulb.
- Other inventions included storage batteries, a dictaphone and a mimeograph (a kind of photocopier), created a rudimentary movie camera, experimented with 'talking pictures', developed electrical power from power station generating stations.

Over time, her mother fell ill and died. Thomas, on one occasion when he was cleaning and putting away his mother's things, found the letter that years before the teacher had written to his mother and opened it. Great was his surprise when he saw that the content of the letter was very different from what his mother had told him. The message read: "*Your son is mentally deficient. We cannot allow him to attend our school. He's expelled.*"

Edison was very moved and wrote in his diary these words: "Thomas A. Edison was a mentally handicapped boy whom his mother turned into the genius of the century." Thomas Alva Edison was considered by his teacher "mentally retarded and unproductive." But his mother didn't give in to such a diagnosis. She decided to educate him and love him in a very special way. Thus, his mother became his main supporter, and only through her constant encouragement and warm words did Thomas Edison become the great inventor he became.

## **2.2.4 Develop our faith in God**

But how does the Pygmalion effect relate to what the Bible says? Well, it's easy; God has great expectations of each of us. As Christians, we must believe in God's promises.

- He has said that He has good plans for us (Jer. 29:11).
- He has designed each of us with a purpose

- He has created us in Christ Jesus to do good works. Ephesians 2:10
- God is no respecter of persons; He treats the rich and the poor alike, for we're all the work of His hands. Job 34:19
- He promises to renew our strength. Isaiah 40:31
- God promises to strengthen us and help us and sustain us with his victorious hand. Isaiah 41:10
- God has given us His precious and magnificent promises so that we, after escaping from the corruption that's in the world due to evil desires, may have a part in the divine nature. 2 Peter 1:4
- God has promised to give us rest. Matthew 11:28
- God will provide us with everything we need, according to the glorious riches that he has in Christ Jesus. Philippians 4:19

It's up to each of us to believe in His beautiful promises. We must leave behind those beliefs that have been in our minds and have prevented us from growing in the image and likeness of Christ. As an example, let's recall some biblical stories.

#### **A. David's example.**

As the youngest of the children and perhaps not expecting much from his father, David decided to believe God. From being a humble shepherd, he became the king that God chose to establish his kingdom. Let's look at some relevant data:

- David was anointed king by the prophet Samuel while still in his teens.
- David faced and defeated the giant Goliath who was terrifying even the most experienced warriors of Israel. David was most likely between 16 and 19 years old. The fact that David was not yet serving in the army tells us that he was less than 20 years old (see Numbers 1:3).
- The Bible tells us that "David was thirty years old when he began to reign..." (2 Samuel 5:4). That is, more than ten years passed between when he was anointed as king and when he assumed the kingdom. In all that time, he was respectful of King Saul's life and expected God's promise to be fulfilled.
- God granted him that from his descendants there would be kings to succeed him in the kingdom. Although the nation was divided, his dynasty ruled the kingdom of Judah.

#### **B. The example of the 12.**

Our Lord Jesus was pleased to choose as disciples simple, humble people with different ways of thinking. Simple fishermen, a tax collector, a revolutionary, among others. In them he left the great responsibility of spreading the good news of the gospel in such a way that it reached all the ends of the earth. They learned by walking with Jesus daily and believed him.

- God used them to found His church on the day of Pentecost.

- Together with Paul, also chosen by our Lord Jesus, they began missionary journeys, establishing churches in each place they visited.
- Through them, God continued to perform miracles so that people would believe the message of salvation in Christ.
- Through them the message of salvation has reached our days and has reached you and me.

## 2.3 Conclusions

Before starting to establish goals in our life plan, we must identify all those false beliefs that the enemy has planted in our thinking. This is important because those beliefs direct our thoughts and actions. If there are false thoughts of defeat, of pessimism, they could lead us to remain passive and not try to do things that please God and are for our benefit.

We have recalled some of God's great promises for our lives in order to keep in mind that He's with us at all times. He has good plans for us, and he expects us to do our part so that God's expectations of our lives are fulfilled. Those expectations encompass that we do good deeds and reproduce ourselves in other disciples.

We have learned to refocus our own expectations, according to God's plans. Similarly, those expectations should extend to our spouse, our children, brothers and sisters in the faith, and the people with whom we have influence. Remember, God is with us and He's always working for his plans.

### My commitment to God.

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### Reflection exercises and practical application.

1. Identify at least four false beliefs that the enemy has led you to believe. Then plan to eradicate them.

2. Review how teachers can generate the best expectations in their students. Then meditate and think about how you can apply it to your spouse and children.

How to generate expectations in my spouse	How to generate expectations in our children

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## Lesson 3. **My plan for** *spiritual growth*

*Biblical Text: Psalm 127:1*

*Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain.*

*Biblical Text: Phil. 3:14*

*I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*

### Objectives:

- **Identify** the mission that God has for our lives
- **Visualize** how we see ourselves as productive disciples growing into the likeness of Christ
- **Set goals** for our spiritual growth
- **Determine** actions that allow us to achieve the established goals
- **Design** indicators that allow us to evaluate our progress

## 3.1 Introduction

We have learned in previous lessons that to develop a life plan, we must be aware that we have different areas of development: spiritual, family, work, health, social that includes our friends, etc.

We also saw the importance of establishing a series of values that govern our lives. In addition, we have learned the importance of recognizing the gifts, talents, and abilities to fulfill the vocation to which God calls us.

We have also seen how important it is to discard all false beliefs that the enemy has planted in our minds. Along with this, we must see the expectations that God has for us. This challenges us to further develop our faith so that, with God's help, we can make God's purpose for our lives come true.

Now we're going to study how to visualize our future, establish goals and identify indicators that allow us to know if we're progressing correctly. This will help us make the necessary decisions to correct the actions which we need to continue implementing.

## 3.2 Development

### 3.2.1 Our Mission and principles

In a previous "MIG" Manual (Rodríguez, 2021) we recognized that God created us with a general purpose and has given each one a specific purpose, according to their gifts and talents.

Our Mission is to make Christ-like disciples in the nations. To achieve this Mission, we must abide by a series of principles, which in turn give rise to a series of values, as we have seen in past lessons.

At Nazarene Discipleship Ministries, we're encouraged to consider the following core principles that are essential to the process of discipleship:

- a. **Earnest Prayer**, an essential part of discipleship, is communicating with and responding to God. Prayer was expressly modeled by Jesus, who taught His disciples to pray. Jesus' disciples were instructed to teach each subsequent generation of disciples to pray (Matthew 6:9-13).

The Scriptures reveal that intentional and consistent prayer nurtures and develops our relationships both with God and with others, allowing us to see and experience God's activities through His prevenient, saving, and sanctifying grace.

**Prayer guides us to spiritual success. As we deepen our relationship with God through prayer, we experience the guidance of the Holy Spirit and find further measures of spiritual growth and direction. Through intentional, specific, and consistent prayer, the body of Christ becomes the eyes, hands, and feet of the Savior. ID Regulation**

- b. **Compassionate outreach**. God's compassionate and redeeming love is foundational to discipleship and proper motivation for Christian outreach. Compassionate outreach reveals God's love for humanity. God is continually working to prepare people's hearts

**We're called to reach out to others. Every disciple, living faithfully and loving like Jesus, must commit to cultivating genuine relationships with others. Through the prayerful and compassionate action of the disciple, God reaches out and prepares hearts to receive salvation. When the disciples relate to unbelievers, they're obeying Jesus' command to go to all creation to proclaim the Good News (Mark 16:15). ID Regulation**

to receive salvation. A disciple's care for unbelievers is what gives face and hands to the grace and love of God. Therefore, a disciple's authentic and loving relationship with unbelievers is essential to communicating the beauty of God's grace and salvation.

- c. **Comprehensive biblical learning**. Jesus gave high priority to teaching His disciples based on the Scriptures. It was His knowledge of the Scriptures, combined with His instructions, that shaped their knowledge of God and the work of the Holy Spirit.

Learning the scriptures through individual and group study helps us become more like Christ. By studying the Word, which is active and alive, we discover who God is, how God loves, and how we should love others. By doing this, we allow God to speak to us, mold us, and sanctify us.

**Actively participating in the systematic study and application of God's Word is a catalyst for spiritual transformation and growth. As we grow and learn, we begin to fully understand and obey God's mission for his disciples to go out and reach unbelievers with God's love. When we allow God's Word to transform us, we're modeling to others the importance of learning God's Word. ID Regulation**

- d. **Intentional mentoring and training.** Jesus disciplined through the personal mentoring and training of a select group of individuals. These methods helped Christianity grow and transform society.

To become what God wants us to be as disciples of Christ, we need to be willing to grow and help others grow as Jesus did. Therefore, mentoring and training others in the path of discipleship is essential for Christian growth and maturity. ID Regulation

Mentoring and training is a discipleship process that introduces new believers to Jesus and reveals how to personally and fully follow Him. Mentoring is a loving way to teach accountability and introduce non-believers to the full knowledge of Christ.

- e. **Authentic relationships.** Just as Jesus gathered His fellow travelers, we, as His disciples, are called to travel together as members of the Body of Christ. All who are committed to the Great Commission must engage in relationships that honor God and build up the Body of Christ.

When we care deeply for each other, we discover how rich our identity in Christ is and the result is spiritual growth. Such loving relationships help us to walk the path of holiness because we're receiving encouragement and loving correction. These relationships, which are based on the Spirit, are necessary when we support one another to live a totally surrendered and Spirit-filled life. ID Regulation

The center of our faith and our life is to love God and love others. Knowing that we're unconditionally loved by God and by others, the result is unity in the Body of Christ. This unconditional love knows no cultural, generational or structural boundaries. This unconditional love is only possible thanks to the action of the Holy Spirit.

### 3.3.2 Visualizing our future

To establish the goals we want to achieve, we must first do a visualization exercise of how we perceive ourselves in the future. This exercise can be done in each of the areas of the person (spiritual, family, work, physical and emotional health, etc.). In this case we're going to focus on the spiritual area. So, let's do an exercise of how we conceive of a mature Christian.

Below is an example of how we can visualize ourselves as mature, productive disciples, bearing fruit, and reaching others for Christ. You can add some other ideas after reviewing God's expectations of us.

Characteristics and Biblical Basis	Description of the characteristics of fruitful disciples
1) <b><i>Perseveres in the faith, fellowship and biblical doctrine.</i></b> Acts 2: 42, 46-47.	They have been born again, having put their faith in Christ for salvation and forgiveness of their sins; They know the articles of faith and the agreed Statement of Faith of the Church of the Nazarene; <b>They persevere in this faith and maintain their fellowship with God and with other church members by regularly attending small group meetings as well as attendance at Church.</b>
2) <b><i>Rescue the lost in sin:</i></b> Jude 1:20-25; Mark 16:15.	<b>They testify of their faith in Christ naturally, intentionally, and with the supernatural power of the Spirit.</b> They can explain and apply in their lives the importance of constantly receiving forgiveness and granting forgiveness, living in spiritual health. They are actively involved in the Christian community and bring people lost in sin to the feet of Christ.
3) <b><i>Work with generosity and integrity.</i></b> 2 Cor. 9:7-11	<b>They embody the generosity of the Heavenly Father who "gave" His Son, performing good deeds of love and obedience.</b> They invest time, effort and comprehensive resources so that others might know and experience God's love by responding to their needs.
4) <b><i>Live in holiness.</i></b> 1 Peter 1:14-16; Mark 12:30-31	The fruitful <b>disciples experience the filling of the Spirit of God:</b> They conduct themselves by following Jesus' model in their personal lives and relationships; They use their gifts and talents to extend the Kingdom of God in their community and nation because they've experienced the regenerating, purifying and empowering work of the Holy Spirit;
5) <b><i>Intercede in prayer:</i></b> <i>Col.4:12</i>	They pray for their personal and family needs and <b>intercede earnestly for the salvation of the lost and for the holistic needs of others.</b> They actively participate in intercession groups, involving others in this ministry
6) <b><i>Disciple others:</i></b> <i>Matthew 28:18-20; Challenge of Phil. 4:9.</i>	Like Jesus, they're involved <b>in reproducing other disciples.</b> For this reason, in an intentional and systematic way, they share with other people what they're learning in their spiritual and integral development, and they commit themselves to helping their leader in the direction of a life group or a ministry. They mentor others to help in the development of other disciples.
7) <b><i>Authentic worship</i></b> Romans 12:1-8; John 4:21-24.	They are committed to holistic service and authentic worship: They worship God in attitude, words and actions; <b>They remain active in service,</b> multiplying disciples, with the leadership of a life group or through the constant exercise of an intra- or extra-temple ministry depending on the gifts, talents or capacities which God has given them.

8) <b>Love for neighbors</b> <i>John 15:1-17;</i> <i>1st. Cor.13</i>	The disciples' relational holiness is grounded in love for their neighbors. This leads them to feel a passion to share the Good News, as well as contributing to meeting the needs of others, starting with their own family.
9) <b>Obeys Jesus.</b> John 15:1-17	They are guided by Jesus's commandments; They're passionate students of the Word. They desire to let Jesus' demands direct their lives.
10) <b>Gives evidence of the Fruit of the Spirit.</b> Gal. 5:22,23	They practice spiritual disciplines in search of the fullness of the Holy Spirit.  They are Christ-like, <b>manifesting the fruit of the Spirit</b> in their lives

### 3.2.3 Setting goals

A goal is what we intend to achieve and for which an action plan must be established. These goals must go in the direction of the great purpose we have. It's important to remember what Paul teaches us about it when he states: *I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.*" (Phil. 3:14)

Goals help us focus not only on doing what God has called us to do, but on becoming who God has called us to be. Some reasons why goals should be set are:

- Help focus on what needs to be done to achieve it.
- They allow to see how what was planned is being achieved.
- They alert us if we must make a greater effort to reach the goal.

There are five basic characteristics of goals. These form the SMART acrostic for its acronym in English (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, Timely). These features are described below. (Pursell, 2020; Silva, 2019).

- 1) **Specific:** describe what you want to achieve. If two or three people read the goal, they should understand exactly the same thing, without the need for further explanation. For example:
  - I will improve my health this year (incorrect)
  - I will lose 8 kg this year (correct)
- 2) **Measurable:** the indicator with which we're going to measure whether the goal was fully achieved, partially achieved or not achieved must be specified. Peter Drucker, quoted by D. Silva (2019), points out that "what cannot be measured cannot be improved". For example:
  - Be more spiritual this year (incorrect)

- Take better care of my relationship with God this year, through: a) reading the Bible at least once, b) praying every day in the morning for at least 20 minutes, c) reading 4 chapters daily (correct)
- 3) **Achievable:** make it challenging and realistic. Consider the various resources available to you, your talents, your time, your motivation. It's also good to have historical data, if that's the case, of how that variable has behaved (attendance at worship, gain of new converts, etc.)
- Save a year to buy a car (wrong if you're out of capacity).
  - Save for a down payment on a car and pay it off in a maximum of 30 months (correct).
- 4) **Relevant:** it's something that's worthwhile for the family or organization, since it's aligned with its great purpose.
- We're going to give our children a good education (incorrect)
  - We're going to send our children to study at University X when they graduate from their High School (correct)
- 5) **Timely:** specifies in what time the goal will be achieved
- We're going to improve the Christian education of the families of the church (incorrect)
  - We're going to teach 3 courses for 15 families each semester this year (correct)

A series of SMART goals are set out below for ease of understanding. It should be made clear that goals may vary from person to person, depending on their current state of development.

- Begin to pray every day for at least 15 minutes in the morning, and gradually increase the time of prayer.
- Study the entire Bible in one year.
- During the year, take at least 3 courses of the level of discipleship that corresponds to me.
- Achieve this year, at level 4 of the practice of spiritual disciplines (according to Annex B).
- Read at least one mentoring book in the year, with the purpose of mentoring others and being mentored.
- Request a fellow believer to be my mentor and meet at least once a month for orientation and accountability.
- Take the Diploma for Trainers of Disciples in Grace, with a duration of 10 months, in which at least 4 teachers from the local Church participate.
- Join a small group and have an attendance of at least 80%.
- Start discipling at least three new people (non-believers) in the year.

### 3.3 Conclusions

We have learned that our Mission is to make disciples in the image of Christ, and our purpose to be Christlike must direct all areas of our lives.

We have learned to establish a future visualization of how we see ourselves in the spiritual area. This exercise can be repeated in our other areas such as family, work, health, etc.

Then, we learned to establish goals (SMART ones) so that it's clear to us where we should direct the actions to be developed.

#### My commitment to God.

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#### Reflection exercises and practical application.

1. Do a visualization exercise in your family area five years from now. How do you see yourself as a parent? How do you see yourself as a spouse?

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2. Set three SMART goals for your family.

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3. Set three SMART goals for your work

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## Lesson 4. *Carriers of His Grace*

*Bible text: 1 Corinthians 15:10*

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

### Objectives:

- **Recognize** that even when we have failed, God is still looking for us to give us His grace.
- **Appreciate** the importance of being bearers of God's grace to bless those around us.
- **Design** strategies to be a bridge for those who need God's grace

### 4.1 Introduction

Grace is a gift that God gives us. Through grace, He seeks us even when we're not believers; He saves us and sanctifies us. That grace accompanies us forever and sustains us even in the midst of the greatest trials. Still, we're not exempt from feeling tired and sometimes we want to quit the ministry or see others who are in that situation. But we're going to study how in the midst of these circumstances the love that God shares with us is part of His grace.

In this lesson we're going to study how the grace of God acts in our life. What does God expect of each one of us after giving us his grace, after giving his Son in forgiveness of our sins? How can we be a bridge so that others also receive this grace?

### 4.2 Development

#### 4.2.1 When grace touches us

To show you how grace operates in each of us, let me tell you a part of my story. I remember that when I graduated from my professional career, an opportunity opened up to study for a postgraduate degree. When looking for scholarship options, I chose one of the most prestigious universities in my country (ITESM). The study program was in accordance with the teacher training needs of the University from which I graduated. The plan was to train in a disciplinary field and return to my Alma Mater and become a full-time professor.

But there was a very serious problem. For the scholarship options back then, one had to apply and wait for the results, which could take four to six months. I wanted to start my studies now, but the University asked us to cover the respective payments in order to start the program.

My father then decided that he would pay the expenses until the scholarship arrived. It was a very hard decision because the cost was one of the highest in the country and my father came from a poor background. His studies didn't even reach primary school. His act of love

marked me. Several months passed before the scholarship arrived. He gave everything to see his son (the youngest of 4) study at a University of excellence.

You may wonder what it has to do with grace. Well, I see a parallel.

- God gives us of His grace to be saved.
- God paid for my sins through offering His Son Jesus.
- He also gives us of His grace to sanctify us and make us better instruments.
- Within His multiform grace, God enables us by giving us gifts to contribute to the building of the Kingdom.
- God gives us the best He has. It's our decision whether we take it or not.

Like my earthly father, God gives me His grace and I don't have to add anything to be saved. But His grace transforms. His grace brings us closer to the image and likeness of Christ.

I remember that every month when I traveled to visit my parents while I was in graduate school, I would return with my report card. I always looked for the best results because in this way, I would honor my earthly father, Don Armando. He didn't expect that He would get his investment back; he only wanted the best for me.

My earthly father put his trust in me. He invested his life savings. He just hoped to see me do the right thing, become a good man and professional, to become the university professor that I dreamed of being (a longing that God granted me).

So, the best way to honor my father was to be a good student and professional...and without a doubt, a good son.

#### **4.2.2 Jesus expects my life to be transformed by His grace**

Let's return to the grace that our heavenly Father gives us. By His grace we're saved, and we cannot add anything to it. But His transforming grace makes us appreciate God and Jesus, by whose sacrifice God's grace operated. After receiving it, could we remain indifferent? If I wanted to respond to my earthly father for his love, generosity and sacrifice, how can I not respond to the sacrifice and love of Christ? He will feel very happy as He sees me progress.

I can only do it one way ... trying to think, act and be like Jesus. Now He expects us to be carriers of His grace, not only for our growth, but to be a blessing to others.

My earthly father didn't just want me to "get good grades" in my grad school. He wanted to see me become a professional who would respond to the extraordinary efforts he made to support me in graduate school for several months (while the scholarship arrived, which God provided). But even more, he always showed me his desire to see me become a good person and a better Christian (when he met Christ).

So, the loving Father doesn't just expect me to learn a few Bible verses. God doesn't want to see only "good students" of the Word. He expects an obedience that implies putting into practice His commandments (John 14, 15). But He doesn't expect mediocre obedience. His demand is to follow Jesus (Matthew, 4:19). That implies growing in the likeness of Christ, nothing more and nothing less than that.

Jesus hopes that His grace in me will not be in vain. Being transformed by His grace, God hopes, as a loving Father, that the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus, wasn't in vain. He expects me to go and share with others

So, wherever we go, we're going to meet His grace, whether it operates in me or operates in that person to whom I'm going to share the grace I received.

We must recognize that this path will have multiple problems. But Jesus has promised to be with us. In addition, it's of the utmost importance that on the Journey of Grace, we must accompany others: family, mentors, brothers and sisters in the faith, companions of our small groups, etc.

### **4.2.3 The grace that works in all circumstances**

One of the most beautiful things is that, although we fail, God doesn't take His love away from us. He will always be willing to give us of His grace. So just as Jesus goes with us on the Journey of Grace, He expects that wherever we go, we should be alert at all times, being bridges to those who need God's grace.

#### **A. The grace of God that seeks us despite turning our backs on God.**

***Hosea and Gomer.*** This is one of the stories that has impacted me the most from the Old Testament. Possibly you know it. God asked Hosea to go and take an immoral woman as his wife (Hosea 1:2 NIV).

Through the marriage of Hosea and Gomer, God lets us see the great pain He feels for the fact that His people (Israel and later Judah) went after idols. It hurt Him so much. God had brought His people out of the land of Egypt and directed them to take the promised land. He warned them not to allow themselves to be contaminated by the idols of the pagan peoples who had previously lived there. And yet they disobeyed.

In addition to showing us His great pain for the betrayal of His people, God also shows us that He's a just God. He had given them a list of promises if they kept His commandments and the Covenant. But he also warned them what would happen to them if they forgot God by going after those idols.

But now I want to highlight something else. God shows His grace, even when we fail him, as the people of Israel were failing at the time of the prophet Hosea. So, we fail or one of our acquaintances has failed, let's be alert to show love and receive His grace.

## **B. The grace of God in adverse situations. Acts 16:23-34**

***The story of the Philippian jailer*** helps us to see that through one decision, God can bring salvation to our entire family. On that occasion, Paul and Silas had been arrested for preaching the gospel. This didn't dampen their fervent spirit. At midnight they sang in the darkest part of that prison, despite the unfair treatment that included 39 lashes with a whip. Then came an earthquake that destroyed the entrances to the prison, and the chains with which they were bound fell off.

The jailer, afraid that Paul and Silas had escaped, tried to take his own life. But Paul and Silas stopped him to help him see that they had not escaped. The jailer entered to corroborate this in the dark. Then, seeing them he exclaimed "*Gentlemen, what must I do to be saved? They said: Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved, you and your house.*"

Here we learn that, although we're facing a very adverse situation like Paul and Silas, in this case because of the gospel, God can use us to impart grace to others. The jailer was undoubtedly the most blessed because he decided that grace would not only be for him, but for his entire family.

If you're like the Philippian jailer, you're on the verge of a crisis to the degree that you no longer want to live. God keeps saying the same thing "*stop, don't hurt yourself. Here I am. I want to give you my grace. Come and receive it.*"

## **C. When the son fails. Luke 15:11-32**

In the passage of ***the prodigal son***, we're shown the love of the Father. After the son had sinned against his father in many different ways:

- He asked for his inheritance while the father was still alive.
- He refused to continue helping him at work.
- He didn't want to receive advice from his father and preferred to go far away.
- He squandered all that he received as an inheritance.

Still, the father applied grace to his son. Here we must learn to apply grace to those who have failed us. Let's not accumulate the "faults that they committed against us". We should be ready as the Father was, to apply grace. Now, if you're the one who has distanced yourself from God, the message is for you: come into the arms of the Father, who still loves you, he wants to give you His grace and wants to restore you as his son

## **C. When we're on the verge of giving up. John 21:15-25**

***After having denied the Lord Jesus, Peter*** was discouraged. Jesus would no longer be with them. That discouragement led him to convince others to return to the old fishing trade. But even there the risen Jesus, went looking for him to give His grace to Peter and those who accompanied him.

Just as before Peter had denied Jesus three times, now he categorically replied three times that he loved Jesus. That love moved him to do whatever Jesus asked him to do.

Sometimes we can think that our ministerial life has ceased because of some mistake or sin. But be careful. Jesus is still interested in us. He asks us like He did with Peter, "do you love me?" Repentance and confession of sins will always work so that God pours out His grace again in our lives.

Whether one has failed, or we know someone who has failed and no longer wants to participate in the service of God, we must be attentive and become receivers or a bridge, as the case may be, of the grace that Jesus wants to continue pouring into our lives. The best of Peter's ministry was just yet to come, after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

### **4.3 Conclusions**

One of the great truths that the enemy doesn't want us to know is that God is always willing to give us His grace and to use us as a bridge at all times to pour out His grace on others.

Thus, we have seen the story of Hosea and Gomer to illustrate how despite the great pain we cause God when, after receiving all kinds of care and blessing from him towards us, we make the terrible decision to change Him for idols. But even there, the grace of God is behind us and wants to attract us with bonds of love.

It doesn't matter if we go through a difficult situation like Paul and Silas were going through because of the gospel. We cannot stop praising His name and bearing witness even in such situations. God can pour out His grace through us not just on one person, but on a whole family. Let's be on guard.

In the same way, sometimes we can be on the verge of giving up our ministry or life of service to God, as happened to Peter. Or it could happen to one of our friends and brothers in faith. We must be there, ready to encourage each other. God's grace is infinite, and God wants to continue providing us with it.

#### **My commitment to God.**

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**Reflection exercises and practical application.**

1. Think of a person you know who isn't yet a believer. What could be a strategy to help you encounter God's grace?

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2. What strategies can you use to be alert to the opportunities that God can offer you to be a bearer of God's grace with the members of your family who still don't have him as their personal savior?

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## Lesson 5. *Prayer* essential for our relationship with God

*Bible Text: John 15:7*

*If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*

### Objectives:

- **Reconsider** prayer as a priority if we want to have communion with God
- **Explain** the characteristics of an effective prayer.
- **Establish** a prayer plan that gradually increases our level of communion with God.

## 5.1 Introduction

Our Lord Jesus taught His disciples to pray on various occasions. He usually did it by example. Jesus prayed for the direction of the Father, in intercession for those who would know him, for the forgiveness of our sins, to prepare for His earthly ministry.

Jesus prayed very early in the morning, sometimes accompanied by His disciples. Jesus also showed us that he needed intimacy with the Father. With all this He showed us that prayer was a priority in His earthly ministry.

What should we do then today? How shall we pray? When shall we pray? What happens when we pray? What happens if we don't pray? This is what we're going to study in this lesson.

## 5.2 Development

### 5.2.1 What's prayer?

When God designed us, He made us relational beings. Those relationships encompass our relationship with Him, our relationship with ourselves, and our relationship with others. He wants to have a daily communion with each one of us. Therefore, he expects us to reciprocate in love and seek Him every day to have that sweet communion.

As Miguel Díez (2010) points out about prayer:

*It's a holy communication with God, a constant dialogue, speaking to him and listening to him, opening our soul to him and receiving the pure and wise thoughts of his mind, entrusting ourselves fully to his care, without having any secrets, considering him our perfect confidant, being totally sincere, transparent, before Him, not only because it's absurd and impossible to deceive or hide something from Him, but because we have surrendered. without any reservation, our heart, all our will, just as we are, before his perfect and eternal love.*

God has shown us what He's like:

- A loving Father, who expects His children to share their dreams with Him, to rely on Him to achieve their goals, to help them overcome the problems they face on a daily basis. That He's willing to give advice and that His wisdom gives direction to the son.
- God is also like the bridegroom who longs to spend as much time as possible with His beloved. That He's willing to listen to His needs and supply according to His sovereignty.
- It's that husband who hopes to fulfill his desires, goals and purpose together with his beloved wife. He wishes to protect us as the husband who even gives his life for us.

God is all that and more.

### 5.2.2 Why should we pray?

Miguel Díez points out that we must (2010):

*Pray, so that the Almighty and Merciful God, help us, strengthen, enlighten, establish and prosper, with continuous protection and blessing, managing to live in perfect freedom and joy, always being benefactors of our neighbor and pleasing to the Lord.*

**We must take prayer very seriously, if we want God to do the same with it. Miguel Díez**

- To know God and what is His specific will for my life.
- Because to live we need to have a continual connection to Him. John 15:7: *If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you.*
- God designed us to be living altars. 1 Peter 2:4-5: *Coming to him, a living stone, rejected by men, but chosen and precious to God, you also, as living stones, be built up as a spiritual house and a holy priesthood, to offer acceptable spiritual sacrifices to God through Jesus Christ.*
- Because He wants to supply what we need. John 14:13: *And whatever you ask of the Father in my name, I will do, so that the Father may be glorified in the Son.*
- Because it's a means for God to pour out His grace in our lives.

### 5.2.3 Characteristics of effective prayer

#### A. When we pray to worship Him.

John 4:21-24 Jesus said to her:

*Woman," Jesus replied, "believe me, a time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You Samaritans worship what you don't know; we worship what we do know, for salvation is from the Jews. Yet a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks. God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in the Spirit and in truth.*

In the "Lord's Prayer," Jesus teaches us to recognize the greatness of God and to approach Him with authentic adoration for what He is. Miguel Díez (2010), adds that at the beginning of prayer we must ask the Lord to direct us by the Holy Spirit, to pray as appropriate, according to His priorities, and we can reach the heart of God.

### **B. Persistent prayer. Lc. 18:1-8.**

Through the Parable of the widow and the unjust judge, Jesus teaches us that God as a loving Father listens to us. If we persevere in our prayer as that widow did before the unjust judge, with more reason Our Father will listen to us and respond according to His will. The persistence of the widow is what distinguishes her and is the basis of what Jesus wanted to teach us through this parable.

How persistent am I? Can I identify with the widow? Like this woman, we can face various problems, but we must persistently pray to God for Him to answer us. Jesus also wants to teach us about the goodness of the Father by comparing God's response with that of the judge.

In this passage we have several key points to remember:

- We must pray, pray and pray without ceasing.
- God is incapable of being unfair with our requests.
- God responds in time.
- God will do justice to his chosen ones

### **C. Prayer to intercede for others.**

The Mission of the Christian is to make disciples in the likeness of Christ. But this isn't human work. We need God's intervention through his Holy Spirit. Therefore, it's of the utmost importance that we pray interceding for the salvation of those who still don't have Christ as their personal Savior.

John 17:20-23:

*My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message.*

### **D. Prayer with faith, believing that we'll receive an answer. Lc. 7:1-10; Matt 8:5-13**

In this passage Jesus heals the servant of a centurion. It's highlighted that: -

- In Matthew 8:5-13 it's mentioned that a centurion's servant is prostrate at home, paralyzed, severely tormented. The servant, falling ill, could be discarded and replaced.
- The centurion approached begging Jesus to heal his servant, showing his humility, despite his position of authority, and the love he had for his servant.
- The centurion didn't ask the Lord Jesus to physically go to his house, but only presented his request.

- The Lord Jesus was willing to travel to his house, to pray for the servant. But the centurion believed in the power and authority of Jesus, without Jesus having to go to his house.
- Jesus was surprised by the faith that this centurion had. Jesus said to the centurion: Go, and as you believed, may it be done to you. And his servant was healed that very hour.

How important it is to go in humility before Jesus and intercede for the health of others. But it's even better to do it with great faith that Jesus in his love and mercy will act in favor of our request. Let's be like that centurion who humbly goes before Jesus, acknowledging his authority and his power and let's intercede for others, believing that Jesus will do it.

However, we must not overlook the fact that the centurion, despite being a Roman soldier, the elders said of him "He is worthy that you grant him this." That implies that our life of obedience and continuous worship is taken into account to see how Jesus responds to us.

### **E. Prayer with confession of sins. Psalm 51:17**

David after falling into sin with Bathsheba, tried to cover it up. That made things worse to the point that it ended with the death of her husband. Desperate at the seriousness of the situation in which he now found himself, David cried out to God in deep repentance. Psalm 51 records his sincere prayers and what he has learned about how God wants us to approach him.

Cristina Fox (2021) points out that:

*My first response to sin in my life is to minimize it. I look for ways to relieve my responsibility. Someone else pissed me off and that's why I responded the way I did. I was sick, tired, or just don't remember doing anything wrong. Or how about this: What I did is not as bad as what someone else did. In all these ways and more, I try to justify my actions, to make my sin seem like a good thing, when in fact it's far from it.*

However, that separates us from God. David recognized this. He had learned years ago that God is close to those who seek him with broken hearts and contrite spirits.

*The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit.  
(Psalm 34:18)*

But what does this mean?

- It means not trying to minimize our sin or looking for someone else to blame.
- It implies not looking for some method to rehabilitate oneself;
- It means grieving greatly in our hearts for having failed before God and acknowledging that we have sinned: "I've sinned against the Lord"

We must learn the following lessons from this passage (Fox, 2021):

- Trust in God's constant love and goodness:
- Our sin is against God. "*Against you, against you only have I sinned.*" Psalm 51:4
- Salvation is only found in God.
- Our sin is a barrier between us and God.
- God wants our contrite and humbled hearts.
- David clung to God's mercy. "*Do not cast me out of your presence, and don't take your Holy Spirit from me.*" Psalm 51:11
- The Lord took away His sin, even though he had to pay the consequences of it. 2 Samuel 12:13
- Our response to His grace is a heart that rejoices and strives to please God. "*Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me.*" Psalm 51:10

#### **F. Praying with humility. Luke 18:9-14**

In this passage, the Lord Jesus narrates the Parable of the Pharisee and the Publican. It's important that we scrutinize the attitudes of both characters and analyze the results that each one obtained before God. The humble attitude of the publican stands out here. We can see that:

- He kept away, he didn't even feel worthy to look up.
- He recognizes himself as a sinner. So he pleads for God's mercy and forgiveness. "*O God, have mercy on me, a sinner!*"
- Feeling unworthy, he cannot even compare himself to others
- His attitude of repentance and humility brought him salvation. Being humble, he was exalted

#### **G. Pray acknowledging the sovereignty of God. Luke 22:39 to 46**

In the prayer of the Garden of Gethsemane Our Lord Jesus is suffering greatly. He asks the Father, if it's His will, to avoid the great suffering that still awaited him. We must learn from Our Lord Jesus, regarding prayer in this passage:

- Carry our burdens to the Father on every occasion.
- God can allow great trials to come into our lives, always with a purpose. Luke 22:44 *And being in an agony, he prayed more earnestly; and his sweat was like great drops of blood falling to the ground.*
- Ask that God's will be done and not ours. Luke 22:42; *Father, if you want, take this cup from me; but not my will, but yours be done.*
- If God allows us to face a great trial, He will make sure to take care of us and strengthen us. Luke 22:43 *And an angel from heaven appeared to him to strengthen him.*

## H. Pleading prayer. 1 Samuel 1

In this passage we see Ana's request for God to grant her a son. The Bible says that:

- Every year when they went to the house of the Lord, the same thing happened. Ana was going to pray before God to grant her a son.
- She, with great anguish, prayed to the Lord and wept inconsolably. 1 Sam. 1:10
- Hannah poured out her soul before the Lord. *"Don't take me for a bad woman. I have spent this time praying because of my anguish and affliction."* 1 Sam. 1:15,16
- The Lord remembered her. In response, God granted her first son, Samuel. 1 Samuel 1.19
- Ana responded to God, giving her son for the service of God as she had promised.
- God compensated her with other children, after being barren for many years.

In this passage I want to highlight Ana's pleading and continuous prayer. This leads us to think: How is our prayer before God? Perhaps one of us has a child who has turned away from God. How much do we pour out our soul before God? We're challenged to follow Hannah's example, and as we do so in faith, we'll see God "remember" us as he did Hannah.

## 5.3 Conclusions

We have studied the importance of Christian prayer. We can say that without prayer there is no communion with God. We have also seen some of the main characteristics that we should consider when praying.

We remember the importance of praying: to worship Him, to do it persistently, to intercede for the needs of others, to pray to reach unbelievers, to ask with faith hoping that God will work, to pray to confess our sins with a contrite and humbled heart, always seek that His will be done, pour out our soul in prayer.

If we stop praying our life stops depending on God. But then the Word is clear and tells us that apart from Jesus we can do nothing. John 15:5. Let's be like those satellites that are always gravitating around their planet so that we're not destroyed by the enemy. In this way we can know him more and then aspire to grow in the likeness of Christ.

### My commitment to God

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### Reflection exercises and practical application.

1. Define in your own words what prayer is

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2. Design a personal prayer plan that allows you to increase your communion with God

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## Lesson 6

# *Developing compassion* for mission

*Bible text: 1 Peter 3:8*

*Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.*

### Objectives:

- **Reassess** the importance of showing love to others through compassion.
- **Design** a Compassion Project proposal to implement in your local church, for missionary purposes.

## 6.1 Introduction

The Church of the Nazarene has promoted Compassionate Ministries Projects since its inception to reach non-believers. However, various factors such as lack of budget, lack of time for church members, or not knowing how to do it, have made this practice little implemented in some local churches.

To achieve more, today we can join efforts collaboratively with other churches. That will allow us, as John Wesley did in his time, to have a greater connection with those reached.

Therefore, in this lesson we're going to study the importance of exercising compassion for missionary purposes, the way in which we can join efforts to have a greater reach in our purpose and the way in which we can finance ourselves.

## 6.2 Development

### 6.2.1 Analysis of a compassion proposal

On this occasion we're going to learn directly by applying it to a proposed Project for an area where there are several Nazarene churches. If this isn't the case with your church, you can join forces with other evangelical churches to pool your resources.

The Project seeks to impact the community through partnering with other local churches. The idea is to provide areas of opportunity to serve the community in order to fulfill the Mission. The project must consider the biblical principles to respond to the current needs of the families in the area and fulfill the integral mission.

#### A. Facilities and equipment

Three of the Nazarene Churches in the area have educational facilities that can be used for this project. They have an area for sports such as soccer, volleyball, basketball, etc. They also have video projection equipment and Internet access.

## B. Diverse vocations.

Since the gifts most frequently are those of **service and help, generosity and compassion** (see table A. Most common gifts), this will allow comprehensive mission work plans to focus on the **"Presence: The church is present in society" option. through good works such as schools, clinics, orphanages, and social work**".

### Most common gifts among the members of these churches

Gifts that stand out with the highest incidence (positions from highest to lowest):		The gifts with less incidence:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service and helping</li> <li>• Generosity</li> <li>• Faith</li> <li>• Compassion</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Evangelism</li> <li>• Teaching</li> <li>• Exhortation</li> <li>• Hospitality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discernment</li> <li>• Apostle</li> <li>• Communications</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Missionary</li> <li>• Wisdom</li> </ul>

The churches in the area have a large number of vocations among their members.

- Various professionals in the areas of psychology, social work, engineering, health, education, law, foreign languages, accountants and administrators, among others.
- People with various trades such as sewing, carpentry, masonry, etc.
- In addition to many expert housewives in the kitchen and many other occupations.

## C. Strategies to follow

- Seek the collaboration of other local churches of the denomination itself and even of other evangelical churches, as well as the help of NGOs and other Associations.
- Allocate at least 15% of the income of each local church to this project.
- Sign collaboration agreements with local and state authorities.
- Offer a variety of services to engage many members, regardless of school level, gender, or age.

## D. Actions to be taken to raise the missing resources

Today there are believers in the churches with the training and vocations to support the actions to be undertaken. However, the following are also required:

- The Church in general is re-educated regarding compassion and evangelism.
- That the believers participate in the Diploma for Families Growing in Grace
- Those who are going to give counseling need to take courses on counseling to implement.
- Sign agreements with stores to obtain products at a lower price (food).
- Sign collaboration agreements with the various authorities.
- Allocate 15% of the income for this Centers of Hope Project. This can grow incrementally starting with 5% the first year.

### 6.2.2 Actions to implement

The intention is to provide the following services to the families of the community around the local churches of this geographical area. See Table 6.2.

**Table 6.2.2 Description of Areas to be addressed and corresponding lines of action.**

Areas to attend	Those responsible and description of functions. Human and material resources	Lines of action to be implemented
Care for single parent families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Believers to cook and serve.</li> <li>• Bible teachers to serve children</li> <li>• Teacher for finance workshop.</li> <li>• Teacher to train in micro-business entrepreneurship.</li> <li>• Church in general for Agape meetings.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Sharing the King's table</i> intends to offer lunches once a month on Saturdays, which include talks, film screenings and recreational activities. It would initially be done on a rotating basis in the churches that have larger facilities.</p>
		<p><i>Managing our finances.</i> It aims to support families to find the best strategies to obtain better performance of family finances.</p>
		<p><i>Agape meetings.</i> It aims to create spaces for coexistence with entire families. It shouldn't be forgotten that mothers who are heads of single-parent families have very little time and part of it they want to spend with their children.</p>
		<p><i>Free or low-cost</i> family gatherings when possible.</p>
		<p><i>Virtuous woman.</i> Train women in small businesses that allow them to meet the economic needs of the family. Includes training to start a business.</p>
Educational advice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Brothers and sisters who deal with support management.</li> <li>• Students and professionals to give classes and support in school tasks.</li> <li>• Access to computers and the Internet</li> </ul>	<p><i>Support in the management</i> of educational scholarships. From government offices, educational institutions, other dependencies they will be supported so that they receive a scholarship to continue with their studies.</p>
		<p><i>Support in daily school tasks.</i> They will be helped to study and do their homework.</p>
		<p><i>Preparation for admission exams.</i> They will be helped to prepare for their exams when they're going to enter the next level of education.</p>
		<p><i>Provide computer service,</i> printing and Internet access. <i>Language courses.</i> Depends on the languages of your country.</p>
Legal support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lawyers to provide advice.</li> <li>• Brothers and sisters who organize forums on rights</li> </ul>	<p><i>Labor advice,</i> to manage child support, to process an inheritance, and other matters.</p>
		<p><i>Carry out</i> talks and promote Forums on the rights of people.</p>
		<p><i>Set positions</i> before the government on laws that are unfair or violate Christian values.</p>
Care for low-income families	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members with training in the area of health.</li> <li>• Members to promote sports and organize activities for family entertainment</li> <li>• Members who manage support from various stores and distribute it.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Growing healthily.</i> Provide support with activities that promote self-care of health, as well as medical care when the family doesn't have any medical service. Support the family so that they can count on some medical service. Promote sports activities where the whole family is involved.</p>
		<p><i>Helping hands.</i> Young people who participate in maintenance help for the houses of these families, without charging for labor. Aspects such as grass cutting, painting parts of houses, small electrical work can be included.</p>
		<p><i>Free or low-cost family entertainment gatherings,</i> when possible (sports, movies, etc.)</p>
		<p><i>Food Bank.</i> A monthly pantry is offered to families with the greatest need.</p>
Health Promotion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Members to cook and serve.</li> <li>• Members with training in the health area, to provide consultations and talks on health care</li> <li>• Members who promote sports and activities.</li> </ul>	<p><i>Sharing the King's table</i> intends to offer lunches once a month on Saturdays, which include talks, film screenings and recreational activities.</p>
		<p><i>Medical brigade campaigns.</i> Includes general consultation medical services</p>
		<p><i>Sports activities in the Church's own facilities.</i> Promote the practice of sports among children, adolescents and young people in the community.</p>
		<p><b>Addiction prevention.</b></p>

Areas to attend	Those responsible and description of functions. Human and material resources	Lines of action to be implemented
Prevention of violence and attention to victims	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members with training in areas of counseling, psychology, social work, etc. to provide counseling and give talks.</li> </ul>	<b>Cooking classes and physical training.</b> Adapt the kitchens of the Church and an area for physical exercise
		<i><b>Provide counseling to victims of violence. Support victims of violence before support institutions.</b></i>
		<i><b>Test application to detect possible problems of violence.</b></i>
		<i><b>Provide legal advice in case of violence.</b></i>
		<b>Give talks for the prevention of violence.</b> Develop reeducation programs for the aggressors.
Improvement of family economy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Members teach the trades</li> <li>Teachers to teach about the creation of micro-businesses and consultant in resource management.</li> <li>Members who are willing to carry out free maintenance work.</li> <li>Members to get financial resources for the tools</li> </ul>	<b>Carry out campaigns</b> in the media aimed at sensitizing and making the population in general aware of this problem of domestic violence.
		<i><b>Trade education.</b></i> Practical sewing workshop. Practical carpentry workshop.
		<i><b>Advice for the creation of micro-businesses</b></i>
		<i><b>Course on Healthy management of family finances.</b></i>
		<i><b>Helping hands.</b></i> Provide maintenance assistance to the houses of these families, without charging for labor. Aspects such as grass cutting, painting parts of houses, small electrical work can be included.
<i><b>Bazaar of used clothes</b></i> and elaboration of homemade bread. With the dual purpose of selling them at low prices and so that they can also sell it as a source of income.		

### 6.2.3 Details of the financial resources needed

Currently the Churches have reported the following income to the District Assembly in the last ecclesiastical year. The data is inferred from the tithes delivered.

Church	Reported annual income	Monthly income
Church 1	\$14,748	\$ 1,229
Church 2	\$11,040	\$ 920
Church 3	\$6,468	\$ 539
Church 4	\$10,500	\$ 875
Mission 1	\$7,296	\$ 608
Mission 2	\$3,552	\$ 296
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$ 53,604</b>	<b>\$ 4,467</b>

We recommend setting aside 15% for this compassionate project in order to fulfill the Mission. That is, there would be  $\$53,604 \times 0.15 = \$8040$  divided by 12 months. That equates to approximately \$670 U.S. dollars. /month. To prevent some churches from resisting participation, several options are suggested:

- Make an annual increase of 5% until reaching 15% of income in the third year.
- Gradually implement the indicated ministries.
- Reallocate some items from their current budget.
- Gradually implement the selected ministries.
- Have the churches carry out activities to collect funds in order to fulfill the Holistic Mission. They can be food sales, bazaars, etc.
- That a Board of Trustees be formed to manage financial resources with people (Christians and non-converted), local authorities, etc. that they be "ministry partners.

#### *Breakdown of main financial resources required*

##### Variable expenditures

Action to take	Unit cost	Quantity	Cost per month
Breakfast. Includes eggs, tortillas, juice or coffee.	\$1/child	60 children. Once a week	\$240/month
Gas for cooker			\$12/month
Electricity			\$50/month
Internet		3 locations	\$52/month
Recreational activities	\$75/activity	Once a month	\$75/month
		<b>Total Cost</b>	<b>\$429/month</b>

##### a) Single investment (initial investment)

Action to take	Unit cost	Quantity	Total cost
Used Computers	\$250	8	\$2,000
Sewing Machines	\$250	8	\$2,000
Printer	\$150	1	\$150

Various equipment for carpentry workshop. Check details in <a href="https://herramientas.tv/herramientas-para-taller-de-carpinteria/">https://herramientas.tv/herramientas-para-taller-de-carpinteria/</a>	\$1,000	1 kit	\$1,000
Oven to make homemade bread	\$500	1	\$500
		<b>Total</b>	<b>\$5650</b>
<b>If the initial investment is deferred for 24 months, the expense would be</b>			<b>\$236/month</b>

The sum of the initial investment deferred to 24 months and the variable expenses are: **\$665/month.**

Given that's **\$670/month obtained with 15% of the income, the Project has financial feasibility.**

#### **6.2.4 Main problems that may arise and how to overcome them.**

Table 6.2.4 presents the possible problems that may arise and also presents proposals on how to overcome them.

**Table 6.2.4 Possible problems that may arise and how to overcome them.**

Possible problems	How to beat them:
Lack of interest in the Project on the part of the pastors.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Statistics from the last 10 years can be used to show that growth has been very low (less than 2% per year). Therefore, other results cannot be expected by doing the same thing.</li> <li>District leaders should be invited to train the church on what the church is for. We exist to reach the unsaved, and one means is through helping them meet their needs.</li> <li>The area coordinator should be invited to be convinced of the benefits of the project.</li> <li>The involvement of the superintendent and district evangelism coordinator will be key.</li> <li>Prior lobbying work can be done among those who are most likely to innovate in ministerial activities.</li> </ul>
It's argued that there are no resources for its implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Gradually implement the project. The first year you can allocate 5% of the income of each local church, then 10% and the third year allocate 15%</li> <li>Carry out a previous campaign to save the necessary funds.</li> <li>Choose to buy months without interest in special sales made by department stores.</li> <li>Ask a brother to finance the purchases of the necessary equipment without interest.</li> <li>Seek alliances with other churches and organizations.</li> </ul>

Possible problems	How to beat them:
Disagreements about how to manage resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Appoint a committee with lay representatives for the management of resources.</li> <li>• They must provide a monthly report to the pastors.</li> <li>• The resources and their correct application must be audited every month.</li> <li>• The committee may only make expenses authorized by the pastors.</li> </ul>
Disagreements on how to welcome new converts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Clear guidelines should be established on how new converts are to be recruited.</li> <li>• It's convenient that they themselves choose where they want to attend, once they convert, because they must consider the time and cost of travel.</li> </ul>
Low participation of the laity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Church in general is re-educated regarding compassion and evangelism.</li> <li>• Leadership school material can be taught in courses dealing with compassionate ministries and evangelism.</li> </ul>

### 6.3 Conclusions

Our Mission is to make disciples in the likeness of Christ. Statistics show that growth in recent years has been slow. It's time to explore new ways, under biblical principles, to reach unbelievers.

Without a doubt, Compassionate Projects continue to be part of the DNA of the Church of the Nazarene. We see it reflected in the Nazarene Essentials. Let's go back to the old paths, sharing God's grace, teaming up with other churches and giving our brothers and sisters the opportunity to put their gifts and talents into action.

Let us intend great things for God, and expect great things that He will do for us.

#### My commitment to God.

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### Reflection exercises and practical application.

1. Elaborate a Project for your church, if possible with other local churches.

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## Lesson 7. **Importance of establishing *limits and rules***

*Bible text* **Proverbs 22:6**

*Start children off on the way they should go, and even when they are old they will not turn from it.*

### **Objectives:**

- **Explain** the importance of setting limits and rules for children at home.
- **Negotiate** between spouses what are the rules that will govern the home, according to the children's ages.

## **7.1 Introduction**

The healthy upbringing of children often represents many difficulties for families. One of the tools with which God endowed us for this is the establishment of limits and norms or rules for healthy growth. However, many times that hasn't been taught to us in school, in the family and sometimes, not even in Church.

That's why in this lesson we're going to study: What are limits and norms? Why is it important to establish them in the upbringing of children? What would be some tips on its implementation? How does that contribute to the formation of the child? What can happen if we don't establish limits and norms?

## **7.2 Development**

### **7.2.1 Setting limits**

God is a God of order. This implies that we must live in order. At the same time, we must teach our children to live in an orderly fashion from an early age. As parents, we have a responsibility to help our children grow up to be disciplined adults.

*Got Questions* (n.d.) offers us an excellent summary of the repeated way in which God calls us to live in order and to do the same with children:

- Discipline is an integral part of raising godly children, for we know that "*the Lord punishes whom he loves*" (Proverbs 3:12).
- The Lord "*scourges everyone whom he accepts as a son*" (Hebrews 12: 5-6).
- We know that God disciplines us for our good (Hebrews 12:10).
- When we discipline our children, they receive wisdom (Proverbs 29:15).
- Correcting our children will give us rest (Proverbs 29:17) and respect (Hebrews 12:9).

- Punishing our child for bad behavior is a way of showing our love for him. (Proverbs 13:24)
- Physical discipline, such as correction with the rod (properly motivated), is approved by the Bible (Proverbs 22:15, 23:13-14).
- Discipline, although it seems unpleasant to receive, will produce a "*peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it*" (Hebrews 12:11).

Got Questions (n.d.) adds

*From an early age, children are able to discern that discipline is founded on love. Because of this, children who grow up in undisciplined homes often feel unloved and are more likely to disobey authority as they get older. Remember that the discipline administered must be commensurate with the offense.*

In order to ensure that our children grow up in a disciplined way, we need to establish limits and rules so that they know in advance what type of behavior is expected of them. But what are limits and rules? We will see that next.

#### **A. Limits: what they are, and what they do.**

Cecilia P. says that "limits are rules that limit their behavior to provide them with security and structure, and offer them healthy lifestyle habits."

Some examples of limits are:

- Fighting with others isn't allowed.
- Profanity (swearing) isn't allowed.
- Do not go near the fire.
- Do not light the stove.
- Cross the road only when accompanied and hand in hand with an adult.
- Do not access pages with adult content.
- Do not open the door or go with strangers.

Boundaries are like red lines that we'll never let our children cross. At least not without their respective consequences. In general, they are those warnings and/or prohibitions that are directly related to the safety of the little ones, and therefore, its compliance is non-negotiable.

Differences between limits and norms (or rules). For the Argentine Society of Pediatrics

*A limit is the norm that defines the expected behaviors in a certain context. This follows from the values that are recognized in society (solidarity, respect, tolerance, honesty, etc.).*

*The rules set guidelines for behavior, establish what is allowed and what is not. This allows social coexistence.*

Some examples of rules are:

- Wash hands before eating.
- Do not use the cell phone while eating at the table.
- Pick up toys after use.
- You can only play with the ball in the patio of the house.
- Paint only on permitted notebooks or sheets.

## **B. Why children need boundaries and rules**

Alba Carballo (2018) establishes the following reasons why it's necessary to establish limits and norms in children:

- Children need a solid structure to cling to, a good role model to follow and to guide them.
- Children need limits to protect themselves from dangers and risks. They must learn, for example, that if they put their hand near the fan, they will suffer severe damage.
- Children need to know how far they can go in their behavior, otherwise they could become tyrannical children.
- The absence of limits could enhance the child's passivity and apathy.
- We all need boundaries, something to guide us when we don't know the way.

Cecilia P. (n.d.) adds that when limits are established at home, children assimilate aspects such as:

- *Organization*, knowing that everything has its time and place.
- *Compliance* with and learning of rules of coexistence that will accompany them throughout their lives.
- *Responsibility*, assuming the consequences (both positive and negative) of their conduct.
- *The control* of their impulses and the emotional management of their anger.
- The generation of a good *tolerance* to frustration.

### ***What difficulties are expected in the absence of limits.***

The *Argentine Society of Pediatrics* (n.d.) points out the following problems of not setting limits and rules for children:

- Lack of tolerance to frustration (excessive discomfort at not being able to do what you want)
- Behavior problems (whims, aggressiveness)
- Impulsiveness
- Lack of recognition of authority
- Difficulties in recognizing the other as subject and as similar to oneself

As we can see, there are well-founded reasons to work within limits and rules at home for our children.

### C. Tips for Setting Limits and Rule

The *Argentine Society of Pediatrics* (n.d.), Alba Carballo (2018) and Cecilia P. (n.d.) recommend following the following advice when establishing standard limits: -

1. **Start with the limits from earliest childhood**, from the first year. In this case they are small rules, like, for example: if you go up there you will fall, touching this could break it... The baby has to learn to interpret and identify that NO means NO.
2. **Set short and clear limits**. If you use short sentences with specific messages where you tell your child what you want them to do, it will be easier for them to carry out the order. An order of this type: "To cross the street you have to hold mom's hand," makes it clear in a few words what the child has to do.
3. **Establish the consequences** for not meeting the limits and make it known in advance. When establishing a limit, we need to indicate what the consequence will be when not complying with it. Thus, the child will know what they have to do and what will happen if they don't do it. In addition, the consequences must be maintained despite cries and protests.
4. **Be consistent in complying with the rules**. If on one occasion the child violates a rule such as watching television before doing homework, and there are no consequences, then the child assumes that it's not important to follow the rule. This should be prevented from happening again, enforcing the rule on every occasion.
5. **Consensus limits between both parents**. Doing it this way will avoid arguments between the couple. It will also prevent children from trying to manipulate parents. If the rules and consequences aren't the same for both parents, the children will grow up knowing which of them is easier to convince to achieve their wishes.
6. **Repetition of limits**. This should be applied especially in the case of young children because they take longer to assimilate information, and repetition makes it easier for them to remember the rule. They will not obey at first; they need time to learn self-control. So, patience is recommended.
7. **Equal limits for all children**. Situations of jealousy or competition between siblings should be avoided. Differences between children should be marked by their age or development level. It's better to explain to the child why a different rule is applied. For example, your brother may go out to play with the other children because he is older. When you grow up you can also go out and play.
8. **Stable routines**. When rules are repeated consistently, they become routines, which provide structure and security. For example, this way the child will know that before dinner they need to take a bath and after dinner they go to bed.

9. **Firmness in the application of limits.** Avoiding shouting. You must speak with a confident voice and a serious gesture. Get down to their level and look them in the eye as you talk to them. Consider that if your child is having a tantrum, there is no possibility of dialogue because emotion gets in the way. In those cases, help them calm down and then talk to them so that they can understand that they have to comply with the rule.
10. **Control your anger.** Sometimes when kids don't want to follow an order and argue with you, trying to talk you out of doing something, you can get angry. However, anger and shouting should always be avoided, since this prevents us from assimilating the rules. What will happen is that you lose authority by imposing punishments based on anger. Therefore, you must control anger so you can think before acting. By your example, your child will learn to self-regulate their own emotions.
11. **Reinforcement of the positive aspects.** Praise your child when they follow a rule and reinforce each small step they take. Remember that they need some learning time and we all like to be recognized for our successes. With this, you will be encouraging them to continue obeying.
12. **We must forget the usual:** 'because I said so!'. Children must understand the reason for a rule: why they have to go to bed early, why they have to stop watching television. Thus, they will be able to develop internal behavioral values. The more concise and clear the explanations are, the better.
13. **Consider** the different ages to mark a limit.
14. **Offer alternatives.** It would be interesting, when saying no, to be able to offer a possible alternative. (You can't play with this, but let's find something you can play with now.)

## 7.2.2 Establishing norms or rules.

### ***Making family rules***

Harmony at home and a stable family life are essential for the healthy development of children in terms of physical and emotional aspects. To maintain order in the home and encourage appropriate behavior in children, it's essential to establish family rules. These rules must serve as a guide to establish limits and solve problems within the family.

The development of family rules provides a framework of behavior and a structure that allows children to distinguish between what is correct and what is not, serving as a reference. Family rules offer children security and confidence inside and outside the home, regulating their behavior based on a system of acquired family values. Likewise, family rules help develop good self-esteem and facilitate social and emotional adaptation.

## A. What are family rules?

They are a set of rules of coexistence established within the family nucleus. Basically, it brings together and summarizes the responsibilities of all the people who make up the family: mom, dad and siblings. Its objective is to facilitate communication and cooperation between those involved and promote a healthy environment based on values. It's highly recommended that such rules be put into writing.

A family regulation must be drawn up with the participation of all family members. This means that there must be a dialogue and prior agreement between parents and children so that everyone is willing to comply with what is established.

## B. Characteristics of family rules

In order to ensure that the established family rules are adequate, it's important that the following characteristics are met:

- **Consistent:** the rules shouldn't change from one day to the next and compliance or non-compliance with the rules must always have the same consequences.
- **Clear:** the rules must be known and understood by all family members.
- **Positive:** the rules aren't prohibitions or limitations, but indications that lead to good attitudes and good behavior.
- **Equitable:** cover all members of the family, not just the youngest.
- **Concrete:** Don't make so many rules that the family can't remember them. Toddlers and preschoolers can only learn and remember two or three rules at a time.
- **Specific:** it will be different for each family, based on the needs and areas of opportunity.

## C. Identification and development of family rules

The rules that are important to the family should be clearly identified and defined. These rules can be specific to a situation, such as mealtime, or specific to inappropriate behavior that has been occurring, such as hitting a sibling or jumping on furniture. Family rules should be important enough that there are no problems applying them consistently.

Once the behaviors to be changed have been identified, you need to transform the list into one of "positive objectives" and formulate these objectives in the form of "rules of conduct", which are clear and concrete. For example:

- **Unwanted behavior:** hitting his brother.
- **Positive goal:** react in a friendly manner.
- **Rule:** Respond with kind words at all times.

It's important to avoid vague rules like "behave yourself." This encompasses many different things and can be difficult for a child to understand and carry out. It would be more specific to say "use kind words when addressing others". Some examples of common family rules are:

- Follow adult directions.
- Respond with kind words at all times
- Wait your turn to speak.
- Speak without raising your voice.

It's recommended that the whole family participate in the development of the rules and that appropriate consequences be established in case the rules aren't followed.

#### **D. Explanation of the rules**

Once the rules have been established, the next step is to make sure everyone in the family knows and understands them. In order for children and adolescents to feel more motivated to follow the family rules, they need to understand them. In that case, if the rules have been put into writing in a regulation, which is highly recommended, a section can be included where each member signs that they have read and accepted what is established.

Toddlers and preschoolers need frequent reminders of the rules. These can be repeated to them often and reminders can be posted in places where everyone can see them. It's also useful to place a table of rules in a common area of the house so that everyone remembers them. A good option is the refrigerator door or a door that everyone uses.

#### **E. Application of the rules**

Once understood and agreed upon, all family members must follow the family rules. Young children learn a lot about what is expected of them by observing the adults in their lives. This means that they watch their parents to know how to behave. For example, if you're respectful and listen to other adults, you can teach your child to listen to adults.

In order to reinforce positive behaviors, you need to observe children following the rules, and recognize and appreciate their effort with praise. Specific praise lets children know exactly what they have done well. Praise should be given at the time good behavior is observed.

On the other hand, when a rule is disobeyed, there must be an immediate response, and the consequences established for both parents and children must be applied. Consequences for not obeying family rules must be implemented immediately.

### **7.3 Conclusions**

Parents have been given the privilege of being guardians of our children's lives for a very short period of time. We must be aware that the teaching and training we give them is eternal. God has made it known to us by ordering us to instruct the child in His way.

Let's exercise discipline with grace so that the child's character is formed at each stage of his life. Let's do it with great love, enjoying how the artist does when discovering how the masterpiece he is sculpting is going.

Let's ask for the direction of the Holy Spirit to establish, implement and enforce the limits and norms that are to form the hearts of our children.

## My commitment to God.

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## Reflection exercises and practical application

1. Set limits and norms (rules) for the children in your home. Consider the age of each child. Establish the consequences of not following the corresponding rule.

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2. Develop a plan to exercise self-control in raising children, and lovingly hold them to your standards. How can you avoid responding with anger when the child resists compliance and throws a tantrum?

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## Lesson 8 **Cristian** *Masculinity*

**Bible Text:** **1 Corinthians 16:13-14**

*Be on your guard; stand firm in the faith; be courageous; be strong. Do everything in love.*

### Objectives:

- **Explain** the hegemonic model of masculinity that prevails in today's society.
- **Explain** the biblical characteristics expected of the man who lives by biblical principles.
- **Evaluate** yourself to see what changes you need to implement to have a Christian masculinity.

### 8.1 Introduction

**Masculinity** is an idea about the characteristics, values, functions and behaviors that are believed to be typical of men in a given culture. That is, an idea about how men should live, what their attitudes should be, and the "masculine" role that they "have to" carry out, as well as the thoughts and emotions of men.

However, masculinity isn't just a biological issue, and it's not something you choose to be, it's part of God's design for our lives. That's why we must study: What's a true man like? Who should be our role model of real, healthy manhood? What distorted practices of masculinity should we eradicate from our lives?

### 8.2 Development

#### 8.2.1 Concept of masculinity

*"Masculinity can be defined as the accepted way of being an adult male in a given society." A social construction at a given time, which varies with time, social class, race and age. It's constructed in opposition to femininity.*

1. Socially and culturally learned and, therefore, there is no single type of masculinity.
2. Dynamic, that is, it changes or is modified.
3. By being culturally learned, more co-responsible learning can be built.

Stuart W. Scott (2022) notes that:

*In more recent Western history, the growing relativism (the belief that there is no ultimate truth) and the resulting individualism ("only I know what is right for me") has had a great impact on the concept of masculine and feminine genders. This mentality of "no-absolutes" means that each man is left to his own "wisdom" in the matter of masculinity... The final result of this cultural and philosophical education has led, unfortunately, the person to move away more and more from God's ideal project for the human being.*

## 8.2.2 Changes over time in the concept of being manly

Stuart W. Scott (2022) points out that depraved ideas regarding what it is to be manly have negatively affected men and women throughout the centuries. In the ancient world we find everything in male behavior, from the mistreatment of women to large-scale barbarism.

- In early Greek culture, the “real man” looked down on his women as mere housewives and child bearers. They also didn’t allow their presence at the dinner table or in any group.
- In Roman culture, women were no more than the means to have children legally, and temporary fantasies that could be discarded at the whim of the man. In contrast, men who lived in a matriarchal society were absorbed into the family of their wives, following the leadership of the mother or grandmother, and disappearing from the context.
- In the Jewish culture there was also much contempt for women. The man could divorce his wife under any pretext, detracting from all value.
- Throughout history, we see some cultures that devised more extreme ways for the young man to demonstrate his masculinity or virility. We cannot conclude that it’s necessarily wrong that there should be a rite of passage ceremony for young men, but that the man has to prove something has historically been a really bad idea.
- In the United States, the feminist movement arose, at least partially, in reaction to the current injustice of men against women. Over time, that movement grew and became a far-reaching catalyst, causing confusion, and has even gone so far as to redefine male and female gender types.

## 8.2.3 Hegemonic masculinity

According to traditional gender roles and stereotypes, **hegemonic masculinity** is represented by the male supplier, strong, powerful, womanizer and insensitive. It’s the most widespread type of masculinity. It can be described as follows (Bolaños & Soto, 2017):

- Demonstrate and/or have more power than other men and control women.
- Impose one’s will and/or use violence to achieve it.
- Avoid being at home and not doing domestic work, or taking care of children, sick people or older adults.
- Exercise abuse or violence against women in relationships, work or in public space against strangers.
- Being “strong-tough” to show “manliness”, not showing “female” feelings.
- Not being affectionate or tender, or being vulnerable or expressing many emotions.
- High-risk sexual practices to demonstrate “manhood” without thinking about the consequences.

- Treating one's own body as a "machine": powerful and tireless, that doesn't feel pain and doesn't require significant care.
- In the face of physical and mental health problems, don't go to medical check-ups or seek professional support because "that is for the weak."
- Discriminate and/or verbally or physically punish men who don't comply with these ideas-mandates of the "true man".
- The search for risk and dangerous situations.

### **8.2.4 Jesus' model of masculinity**

Through the life of Jesus, we can learn certain principles applicable to masculinity. Some of them are:

- His work
- The respect he had for women
- His meek and humble character
- His concern for His family
- His great love for children
- His obedience to the Father
- He restored relationships with others.
- Fulfilled his commitments.
- Valued marriage.
- Valued men and women equally.

### **8.2.5 Christian model of masculinity, based on biblical principles**

As Stuart W. Scott (2022) points out, the first step in recovering a true understanding of masculinity is recognizing that man's wisdom is deceitful. The Bible points out regarding one's own opinion: "*There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end, it leads to death*" (Prov. 14:12).

I agree with Stuart W. Scott (2022) in stating that men shouldn't follow the path that seems right to them or to society regarding masculinity because that's causing great damage to the lives of men, families and society itself.

A model of Christian man will :

- **Demonstrate** that they honor Christ by submitting to one another. It includes mutual submission between men and women. Mainly from those in his house. "*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*" Ephesians 5:21
- **Consider** the opinions, thoughts and feelings of others. "*Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.*" Proverbs 15:22

- **Be an example of service** (work), beginning at home. *"Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave."* Matthew 20:26-27
- **Because "God isn't unjust;** *"He will not forget your work and the love you have shown him as you have helped his people and continue to help them."* Hebrews 6:10
- **Act fairly with others** (including women), with good, respectful treatment, at all times and places. *"If you really change your ways and your actions and deal with each other justly, if you don't oppress the foreigner, the fatherless or the widow and don't shed innocent blood in this place, and if you don't follow other gods to your own harm, then I will let you live in this place, in the land I gave your ancestors for ever and ever."* Jer.7:5-7
- **Demonstrate humanity**, expressing feelings and affections. *"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."* Colossians 3:12  
*"Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble."* 1 Peter 3:8
- **Sexual practice only within marriage.** *"Now for the matters you wrote about: 'It's good for a man not to have sexual relations with a woman.' But since sexual immorality is occurring, each man should have sexual relations with his own wife, and each woman with her own husband. The husband should fulfill his marital duty to his wife, and likewise the wife to her husband."* 1 Corinthians 7:1-3  
*"Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all the sexually immoral."* Hebrews 13:4
- **Treat your body as a temple of the Holy Spirit**, taking care to keep it healthy physically, mentally and spiritually. *"Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You aren't your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore, honor God with your bodies."* 1 Corinthians 6:19-20
- **Demonstrate love for others, being empathic**, applying the Word of God, self-control, patience, brotherly affection. *"For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love."* 2 Peter 1:5-7  
*"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry."* James 1:19

- **Be intelligent and wise** to know what is best and be freed from dangers, disasters and consequences that could be fatal. *"The prudent see danger and take refuge, but the simple keep going and pay the penalty."* Proverbs 22:3; 27:12  
*"Where there is strife, there is pride, but wisdom is found in those who take advice."* Proverbs 13:10

## 8.2.6 Transformative parenting

Transforming fatherhood in the grace that God gives us, allows that:

- They can calmly and freely express their emotions and feelings, being affectionate, close, welcoming and resolving conflicts with all the people with whom they live.
- Manage to start self-care exercises for their being, on the mental, physical, spiritual and reproductive levels.
- Transform the roles at home, managing to be and become protagonists of the work of raising children, of domestic tasks, and of caring for people in disadvantaged conditions in family environments.
- Take on new and varied forms of recreation and entertainment other than self-destructive ones.
- Transcend the sexual, enjoying more and more the love relationship.
- Eliminate micro-macho practices or low intensity pressures to maintain oppressive power over other people, especially women.
- Favor dialogue and the positive transformation of conflict, suppressing physical and verbal force as a supposedly decisive mechanism.
- Question the oppressive power they exercise and transform it, based on balance and sharing of power, in relationships and diverse bonds.

## 8.3 Conclusions

God perfectly designed man and woman and assigned them roles that they must fulfill in every relationship. However, after the fall, and with the passage of time, those roles became distorted.

Today, due to the loss of absolute values, gender ideology and other "cultural" issues, a model of masculinity has been reached that's far removed from biblical principles.

We must recognize that many of the characteristics of the so-called hegemonic model of masculinity are present even in Christian homes. For this reason, it's of great importance to have a clear idea of what God intends for men and women, and to implement the necessary changes in our lives. If we don't, we'll continue to seriously deteriorate our relationship with God, with ourselves and with others.

### My commitment to God.

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### Reflection exercises and practical application.

1. Carry out a self-assessment to identify which traits of hegemonic masculinity are present in your life.

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2. Implement an action plan to experience masculinity governed by biblical principles.

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*Bible text: John 10:10*

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.*

### Objectives:

- **Evaluate** if we're exercising violence or if we're suffering violence.
- **Establish** a plan to eliminate all violence from our lives, starting in the family.

## 9.1 Introduction

Domestic violence has increased dramatically in recent years in many countries. As a consequence of the pandemic, many families reported an increase in violence in their homes.

As Christians, we cannot avoid this reality and we must address these issues. We must analyze: How is violence generated? What types of violence exist? How can we reduce violence in our homes?

## 9.2 Development

### 9.2.1 What's domestic violence?

Domestic Violence (DV) is defined as those situations in which, systematically and prolonged over time, one or more of the members of the family uses their place of power to subjugate another or others with the intention of dominating, harming and/or denigrating, causing physical, psychological, sexual or economic harm. The chronicity or periodicity of episodes of violence are central elements to define a situation as family violence.

#### A. Characteristics of violent men

Some common characteristics of the violent man are (Hegstrom, 2001):

- Has poor self-esteem.
- He believes in all the myths about violent relationships.
- He's a traditionalist and believes in male supremacy.
- Blames others for what he does.
- He's excessively jealous.
- Presents a double personality.
- He doesn't resist pressure.
- Uses sexual intercourse as an act of aggression.
- He doesn't believe that his violent behavior has negative consequences.
- He denies that they have problems as a couple and gets angry if the wife reveals the situation.
- He's extremist in everything he does, mistreating and showing love.
- He grew up in a violent home.

- He had a strange relationship with his mother: an ambivalence of love and hate.
- His personality is abnormal.
- Under pressure, his sensitivity becomes paranoid.

### **C. Common characteristics of battered women (Hegstrom, 2001)**

- Has poor self-esteem. She underestimates her ability in all areas.
- She blames herself for the behavior of the man who abuses her and believes that he will change if she changes.
- She believes in all the myths about violent relationships.
- She is a traditionalist about the home; she believes in established stereotypes.
- She takes responsibility for the acts of the violent man.
- She feels guilty but denies being afraid or angry.
- She tries to control people and situations so he doesn't get angry.
- She shows a passive attitude towards others.
- She suffers from severe psychophysical reactions due to pressure.
- She is a hard worker, but she lives under constant fear and stress.
- She uses sexual intercourse as a way to establish intimacy.
- She believes that no one will be able to help her solve her problem, except herself.
- Many of these women describe their parents as traditionalists who treated them like fragile dolls, making them believe that they could not take care of themselves and had to depend on a man.

### **9.2.2 Risk factors**

Risk factors for domestic and family violence include individual, relationship, community, and social issues. There is an inverse relationship between education and domestic violence. The less education, the more likely it is that domestic violence will occur. Child abuse is commonly associated with becoming a domestic violence perpetrator as an adult. Domestic violence perpetrators commonly repeat acts of violence with new partners. Drug and alcohol abuse greatly increases the incidence of domestic violence.

Children who are victims or witnesses of domestic and family violence may believe that violence is a reasonable way to resolve a conflict. Men who learn that women aren't equally respected are more likely to abuse women as adults. Women who witnessed domestic violence as children are more likely to be victims of their spouses. Although women are often victims of domestic violence, gender roles can be reversed. Common risk factors include:

- Aggressive behavior in youth.
- Antisocial personality disorder
- People with disabilities
- Corporal punishment in the home

- Pregnancy
- Economic stress/families with low annual income
- Women whose educational or occupational level is high relative to the educational or occupational level of their spouses
- Low self-esteem
- A family history of violence.
- Low level of education
- Bad parenting
- Psychiatric history
- Marital discord
- Marital infidelity
- Poor legal sanctions or enforcement of laws.
- History of childhood abuse
- Unemployment
- The use and abuse of alcohol and drugs are strongly associated with a high probability of violence.
- New cases of HIV infection are linked to intimate partner violence.

But why do men mistreat their wives? The expectations that society imposes on men is one of the reasons why men mistreat others. The masculinity that's expressed is a learned behavior that reflects the prevailing attitudes of the society in which the man lives. Some myths about masculinity include: men don't cry or express their feelings, they have to be dominant and the most important, they have to be strong and limit their emotions, and they should always occupy the highest hierarchical position.

### **9.2.3 ¿What are healthy relationships like?**

Healthy relationships are established on the basis of respect and freedom and are strengthened over time. In contrast to the forms of abuse, the components of a healthy relationship are the following:

- Appropriate touch – showing non-sexual physical appreciation.
- Appropriate bonding – emotional support, individuality and "we".
- Economic cooperation – mutual consent for major expenses, communication.
- Respect for property – respect for each other's property.
- Appropriate social behavior – acceptable displays of affection in public.
- Appropriate individuality – right to personal space, interests, activities, friendships.
- Respectable requests – freedom to identify and communicate needs and wants.
- Formation of emotionally healthy children – Family communication and recreation.
- Appropriate communication – everyone has the right to express themselves and is heard.
- Equitable responsibilities – share tasks, develop activities of enjoyment.
- Healthy sexual relationship – mutual communication about needs, preferences, desires.

- Spiritual growth – personal and family relationship with God, spiritual instruction.

## 9.2.4 Myths and realities

- ❖ **Myth:** **Victims of domestic violence like to be beaten.**  
**Reality:** Nobody likes to be threatened, slapped, thrown, choked or kicked. It's not easy to leave a man who is your only livelihood, no matter how abusive he is. It's difficult for the victim to leave the relationship, especially if she has nowhere to go and if she has children to feed. A woman doesn't stay in a violent marriage because she likes it but because many times pressure from her family, church and community leaves her feeling that she has few alternatives.
- ❖ **Myth:** **Once the victim decides to leave, they can easily leave.**  
**Reality:** Most victims of domestic violence leave their abusers, often multiple times. It may take several attempts to permanently separate because abusers use violence, financial control, or threats to children to force victims to return. Additionally, a lack of support from friends, family members, or professionals, such as court personnel, law enforcement officers, counselors, or members of the clergy, can cause victims to return.
- ❖ **Myth:** **Drugs and alcohol cause domestic violence.**  
**Reality:** Drugs and alcohol can increase the level of danger and have been present in at least 50% of domestic violence cases, yet many alcoholics and drug addicts don't abuse, and many people who use violence don't use drugs or alcohol. Ending the person's alcoholism will not end the violence. Both the addiction and abusive behavior should be treated separately.
- ❖ **Myth:** **Batterers abuse their partners because they're under a lot of stress.**  
**Reality:** Stress doesn't make batterers abuse their partners. Domestic violence flourishes because society tolerates abuse from spouses or partners, and because perpetrators learn that they can get what they want through the use of force, without facing serious consequences.
- ❖ **Myth:** **Anger causes domestic violence.**  
**Reality:** People who use violence don't have more anger than everyone else. They use anger as an excuse and justification for their behavior. All people feel anger at some point; however, this isn't a reason to resort to violence.
- ❖ **Myth:** **Violence occurs only in low-income or uneducated groups.**  
**Reality:** Domestic violence occurs in every demographic group, regardless of race, ethnicity, economic status, class, sexual orientation, occupation, or education.

- ❖ *Myth:* **If the woman puts up with it a lot, things will change and the relationship will improve.**  
*Reality:* If the woman doesn't leave, if she doesn't seek legal or psychological help, the physical and mental abuse may get worse, not better. Many women wait for the abuse to end. Some finally leave when the violence is so serious that they want to kill their abusers, or know that the next time the abuser is going to kill them. It's dangerous to get to this point.
- ❖ *Myth:* **If he works and brings money into the house, the woman must put up with abuse.**  
*Reality:* We shouldn't condone violence just because a man is good with children and brings his money into the house. Domestic violence shouldn't be allowed for any reason. The wife must be treated decently like any member of the family.
- ❖ *Myth:* **Intimate partner violence doesn't affect children.**  
*Reality:* Even if your children don't talk about violence, they know it exists and it does affect them deeply. Violence between spouses is an example for children and can be learned. It's quite possible that if your children see this in your home, they too will beat their wives or be abused. Also, living in this kind of home can often cause problems in school for children.
- ❖ *Myth:* **This is God's will and there is nothing you can do about it.**  
*Reality:* Without a doubt there are many things that God arranges in our lives, but He would never accept that a woman is beaten. There is much in our lives that we cannot control, such as a fatal illness or the death of a child, but the control we do have can be used to help stop the violence.

### 9.2.5 Various forms of violence.

Violence against women in the couple is expressed in the following ways:

- **Physical Violence:** It ranges from pinching to beatings with objects, including knives or firearms, and can lead to fatal results such as suicide or homicide.
- **Psychological Violence:** Includes a series of behaviors and verbal manifestations ranging from insults, shouting, ridicule, insults in public, economic or emotional blackmail, and also attitudes and behaviors that involve control of what the person says or does, such as a ban on working outside the home.
- **Sexual Violence:** Includes all acts in the sexual sphere carried out against the woman's will. Due to its devastating effects on the physical and psychological health of women, there's a manifestation of intimate partner violence that requires a specific approach.

Violent people seek control using one or more of the following means (Hegstrom, 2001).

- Physical abuse – hitting, biting, choking, kicking, scratching, slapping
- Power – denies basic rights, denies private or personal life.
- Stalking – Excessive jealousy, distrust, spying.

- Emotional abuse – criticizing, insulting, torturing, extreme controlling behavior.
- Threats to break up the relationship, to harm her, to kill her, to commit suicide.
- Financial pressure – restrictions on work and use of money.
- Bullying – frightening with looks, actions, gestures, shouts, or words.
- Violence against property – hitting walls, breaking doors, etc.
- The weapon of silence – doesn't want to dialogue, doesn't know how to express emotions.
- Isolation – controlling what the partner does, with whom she meets or talks.
- Use of children – using children to send messages or blackmail.
- Humiliation – humiliating in public their wife's appearance, job, chores.
- Responsibility – makes the victim responsible for everything.
- Spiritual abuse, by using biblical passages so that the wife "subjects".
- Sexual abuse – forcing her to engage in sexual acts against her will.
- Male privilege, treating the victim as a servant and acting as her owner.

### 9.2.6 The cycle of violence

Most of the time, violence doesn't happen continuously, but rather in cycles, which makes it more difficult to stop. There are three phases in which violence is produced and reproduced: accumulation of tension, explosion, and honeymoon. They are the cycle of violence.

1. **The accumulation of tension.** This is the most difficult phase to identify; its main element is psychological violence in which the aggressor shows increasing irritability, intolerance and frustration: he insults, isolates, criticizes, humiliates, doesn't take responsibility for his state of mind, is jealous, won't talk, leaves for periods of time, among others. In these circumstances, women often justify her husband's aggressive behavior and resorts to denial.
2. **The explosion.** It's the result of accumulated tension. All possibility of communication with the aggressor is lost and his tensions are discharged. After the violent incident, its possible that the same aggressor will treat the injuries of his victim or takes her to the hospital, arguing that it was an "accident."
3. **The honeymoon.** In this phase, a period of reconciliation begins; the aggressor shows remorse, not for having gotten angry, but for having exceeded the way he did it, apologizes and promises that the incident won't happen again. After several repetitions of the cycle, the phase of reconciliation disappears, passing from the "accumulation of tension" to the "outburst of violence". In this case the aggressions will be increasingly violent.

### **9.2.7 Steps to get out of a violent relationship**

In order to begin to solve their problems, it's important for the person in treatment to recognize the seriousness of their situation and, as a first step, to move away from the problem. Suggested recovery steps for these women include:

1. Seek help.
2. Make your recovery the first priority in your life.
3. Find a support group made up of peers who understand.
4. Develop your spiritual side through daily practice.
5. Stop managing and controlling others.
6. Learn not to "get hooked" on games.
7. Courageously face your own problems and shortcomings.
8. Cultivate what you need to develop in yourself.
9. Become "selfish", put yourself first and learn to tolerate the disapproval of others.
10. Share with others what you have experienced and learned.

There are several phases in the recovery process.

- The first phase begins when you understand the problem and want to stop it.
- Then follows the will and the initial attempt to seek help.
- Next, you enter the phase that requires a commitment to healing and a willingness to continue the recovery program. During this period, the way of acting and thinking begins to change.

In all stages of recovery, self-esteem grows slowly but steadily.

### **9.3 Conclusions**

We cannot call ourselves Christians if we're exercising some kind of violence. Where is our relational holiness? Where is the fulfillment of the great commandment: after loving God with all your might, how do you love your neighbor?

Violence in your home shouldn't be a shameful secret that prevents you from seeking help. In a relationship of violence, these forms can occur simultaneously or the predominance of one over the other or others can be observed. It should be borne in mind that when physical violence is detected, it's highly probable that there's sexual violence. So too, physical violence always implies psychological violence. Intimate partner violence can occur in an intimate relationship coexisting with bonds of affection.

Many victims forgive the aggressions because of the idea or the desire that their partner will change, and that's why the third phase becomes the most dangerous of all, because finally there's the new opportunity for the cycle to end. Every time a cycle is closed, the victim loses self-confidence, and her self-esteem disappears in the face of aggression from her partner.

Once someone has identified themselves as a victim of violence, it's important to know the steps to get out of the violent relationship, but, above all, decide to follow them and plan for it.

### My commitment to God.

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### Reflection exercises and practical application.

1. Take a self-assessment to see if you are committing violence against your spouse or someone else. Which of the characteristics of an abuser apply to you? Review the characteristics studied in this lesson.

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2. If you identified some characteristics present in you as an abuser, make a commitment and plan to change.

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## Lesson 10. *Fathers who are absent emotionally*

**Bible text: 1 Timothy 5:8 GNT**

*But if anyone does not take care of their relatives, especially the members of their own family, they have denied the faith and are worse than an unbeliever.*

### Objectives:

- **Explain** what an emotionally absent parent is.
- **Describe** the consequences of having an emotionally absent father.
- **Take** the necessary actions to avoid being an absent parent.

### 10.1 Introduction

The typical nuclear family made up of father, mother and children has decreased in percentage in various countries such as Mexico. This is reflected in a greater number of single-parent families or reconstituted families.

In countries such as Mexico and Colombia, among others, the percentage of families headed by the mother is increasing. In Mexico, the 2020 Census indicates that 33 out of every 100 households recognize women as heads of household. Similarly, the number of single-parent families continues to grow dramatically. (INEGI, 2021).

Additionally, today's parents have changed their ways of accompaniment and upbringing. Their children are no longer their first priority. Parents now share other priorities such as their work, their academic training and even their leisure and fun time. (Montoya et al, 2016)

Likewise, the rhythm of life is increasingly demanding of our time. This usually causes us stress, depression, anxiety by not properly handling the pressure to which we're subjected daily, etc.

All of the above have caused great damage to the healthy development of our children, who end up paying for our errors. We neglect the attention, care, and love that we should have towards them. All of this is contrary to God's design for the family. The Word of God clearly points out that whoever doesn't take care of their relatives, and especially their family, don't behave like true Christians. (1 Timothy 5:8)

Therefore, in this lesson we're going to see the problems that we cause our children when we distance ourselves from them, be it physically or emotionally.

## 10.2 Development

### 10.2.1 ¿What does it mean to be an emotionally absent father?

A father may not be in the children's lives due to different circumstances. But the absence of the father isn't the same as non-existence. Unfortunately, there are several causes that cause a distance between parents and children. Some of them are:

- The father must go to work in a city other than where his family lives.
- The separation of the parents.
- The loss of one of the parents.
- Physical presence in the father's home, but emotionally distanced from them.

We mainly want to talk about the latter in this lesson. Ferrufino, cited by Victoria Ramos (2016) describes the absence of the father as:

*The disappearance in the family that manifests for different reasons, causing conflicts and alteration such as the absence of signs of affection, alteration in the behavior of the children and even psychological problems in the members of the family system, likewise there is an imbalance since other areas are affected, such as the economy, security, and trust for the development and growth of children.*

Today, the enemy has led us to believe that children need only their mother's love for normal and healthy development. They make us think that dads should only worry about providing economic support for the family and being supportive to the mother. But this is a great deception of our enemy. Various studies have been in charge of demonstrating that a father's love is as important as that of mothers, since both guarantee optimal emotional development in children.

**The love of a father is as important as that of mothers, since both guarantee optimal emotional development in children.**

Michelle Aviña (n.d.) affirms that "Children need a reference to grow, a mirror in which to look at themselves and a person who accompanies them, listens to them and is with them when they need them." What the studies show isn't really something new. The Bible teaches us the importance of the relationship between parents and children that involves giving them love, directing them, encouraging them, establishing the corresponding limits, etc. In short, the Bible stresses to us the importance of modeling how to live a God-centered life. Some passages that show us these are:

- The Bible indicates that the son needs the mother and also the father (Exodus 20:12, Proverbs 1:8,9)
- The Bible tells us about giving instruction to children. (Proverbs 22:6)
- The Word tells us to raise them compassionately. (Psalm 103:13)
- We shouldn't provoke them to anger.

## 10.2.2 Symptoms of being an absent father.

The absent father is characterized by (Carabaño, 2022; Sanchis, 2022):

- A. He neglects the needs of his children.** He's not able to fulfill his responsibilities as a parent, such as continually showing his love, setting limits for them, playing with them, helping them to mature emotionally, supervising their educational progress, etc.
  - B. He imposes his judgment.** He manifests his emotional disconnection by imposing his will and point of view on his children. He doesn't give space to listen to the reasons of the rest of the family. He doesn't value what his family thinks of him. He demands and forces the child to reach very high goals, without recognizing the effort. He also doesn't know how to reinforce positive actions. Additionally, he imposes punishments disproportionate to the age of the children.
  - C. He's indolent.** Although he may be a provider financially, he's unable to deliver a praise or a wake-up call in time. He usually leaves all the weight of the education of the little ones on the mother. He's not very communicative, limiting himself to supplying economically.
  - D. Emotionally immature.** He's the father who refuses to grow up and wants to be an eternal teenager. His children represent a burden to his lifestyle. They haven't achieved the maturity to make the decisions and set the limits that children need. They're unable to be a positive role model for their children since they prioritize the satisfaction of their own needs, and if they don't achieve it, they get angry.
  - E. He doesn't have time.** Emotionally immature people find it hard to relate, they run away from or fear commitments, and they create toxic relationships. (Castro, 2021). The father chooses or is absorbed by other priorities. Sometimes it's due to his work that he's not at home. He may not want to be an absent father and may even come from a home with a positive and loving father. But he delegates the paternal role to him because he must fulfill a demanding workload to provide for hi
- On other occasions, the father is still studying and that prevents him from having time with his children. On other occasions, the father must help in his maternal home, running out of time to fulfill his responsibilities as a father. An extreme case is that in which the father dedicates himself to his personal leisure or entertainment, without attending to his children.
- F. He's irresponsible.** It's the extreme case in which he's not involved in the emotional or economic support of the children. Although the mother presses for him to assume his part of the child support, he ignores her. It's possible that behind an irresponsible father is a child who was raised by an absent father, but this doesn't justify his behavior.
  - G. There may be an absorbing or vindictive mother.** Sometimes, there may be a controlling mother who prevents the father from carrying out his role. This is more common in couples who are breaking up. In addition, there are women who assume all the responsibilities of upbringing and education.
  - H. He keeps emotional wounds.** Sara Sanchis (2022) points out that sometimes, the avoidant attitude to not fulfill his role as father is due to the emotional wounds that separate him and don't allow him to attend to his children as he should.

- I. Shows a lack of empathy.** A physically or emotionally absent parent is one who has little empathy or emotional connection with their children and people around them. He's hedonistic and maintains superficial relationships, lacking in depth, says Indira Ramírez (2021).
- J. Selfishness.** The selfish father forgets that he owes something to his children. He makes life plans without considering the opinion of his children or puts other priorities above his family, such as sharing with friends or attending to work matters that could well wait (Castro, 2021).
- K. People emotionally tied to their mothers.** Fathers who are emotionally distant from their children tend to be very attached to their mothers, putting the existence of the mother figure before their wife and children. This causes conflicts in the couple and a wound of rejection in the little ones (Pipochos, 2018).

### **10.2.3 Consequences in the children of having an emotionally absent father**

Michelle Aviña Vélez (n.d.) identifies the following consequences in children who grow up with emotionally absent parents.

- A. Distrust in others.** Because their parents weren't around when they were needed, they have trouble relating to others.
- B. Behavior problems.** Many children seek the attention of their parents by becoming "rebellious children". They misbehave at school, they use aggression, they disobey the rules, etc. They are looking for the attention of their parents.
- C. Emotional problems.** The lack of affection from one or both of the parents in childhood can generate a teenager with serious problems controlling their emotions. This is because no one taught them how to do it. Upon reaching adolescence, they face numerous feelings that can lead them to build a fragile personality.
- D. Doubts.** Not having a firm reference in childhood, children will act out without having clear rules. This can cause them to become hesitant and indecisive adolescents, with problems making important decisions and, above all, with an inability to commit.
- E. Compulsive behaviors.** Children with absent fathers tend to be less than rational, letting themselves be carried away by impulses. They tend to experience anxiety and stress and often aggressive behavior.
- F. Depression.** The anguish of not having an emotional reference with him can trigger depression in the child.

- G.** Excessively dependent adults. These children will be adolescents with a dependency to look for someone to fill the emptiness they experience. This can lead them to look sickly for people to care for them. They are afraid of being rejected, of being abandoned. Therefore, they can sacrifice themselves excessively in order to have someone by their side.
- H.** Continuous inner emptiness. It's like a hole that they can't cover. Sometimes, this lack of affection from their parents in childhood accompanies them forever.

For his part, Bryan Longo (2021) points out that in children or adolescents who have been abandoned by one or both parents, some of the following consequences may occur:

- They are likely to do poorly in school, or even drop out.
- They have a hard time adapting to the world and to reality.
- They experience constant fear of abandonment.
- They show aggressive behavior towards others.
- They build uninhibited social relationships. For example, verbal or physical behavior that's too familiar, little or no recourse to their parents or guardians, they develop a disposition to go with strange adults.
- They develop a reactive attachment. Very rarely do they seek comfort when they're upset.
- They develop little or no emotional intelligence.

#### **10.2.4 What to do if we grew up with emotionally absent parents**

Bryan Longo (2021) gives us some advice to overcome the damage caused by growing up without the presence of a father who fulfilled his responsibilities. Here are some of those tips and add others:

- A. Learn to forgive.** Elaborating on the abandonment of a father requires individual and above all family forgiveness, although it's not something so simple to achieve. On many occasions, people can accumulate a lot of pain in their hearts for not knowing how to forgive the offenses received. We must be careful that this doesn't happen again.

In lesson 2 of the *Manual Lessons for Marriages (Happily Married) 2021*, you can find more help on how to process forgiveness. We suggest you study the steps suggested by G. Smalley (1998) to make it easier for us to forgive our offenders

- B. Apply grace to your father who was absent.** The grace we have received will allow us to understand that God in his great love has forgiven even the worst of our sins. And he did it only by grace; we did nothing more than receive it through recognizing Christ as personal Savior.

- C. Remember that love is the great commandment.** We must love even that person who seriously offended us. Love goes first in the virtues of the Fruit of the Spirit. 1 Peter 4:8 *"Above everything, love one another earnestly, because love covers over many sins"* (GNT)
- D.** Understand and normalize your emotions. After allowing yourself to listen to your emotions and giving memories a space, it's time to understand them in order to humanize that father figure that you have missed so much. If you understand that you have emotions and you can name each one by the bodily sensations that they provoke in you, you will be able to empathize with them. Accepting that a loss can cause so much pain will keep you from minimizing it or extrapolating it to every other person or situation in your life today.
- E. Empathize with your father.** Recognize that other people also experience emotions and may fail to manage them. Possibly we have blamed ourselves or that absent parent all these years for the abandonment. For example, if we understand that dad or mom may have experienced some emotions of fear of not knowing or not being able to take responsibility for this change in their lives (children) and it's for this reason that they moved away. This, of course, doesn't justify an abandonment or any act of a parent, but it allows us to understand the affective world in which we live and thus allows us to understand the mistakes of others and our own.
- F. Be aware.** Being aware of all these points represents a great advance because we'll be able to separate the pain of others and our own, the emotions of others and our own. Then choose accordingly to love your father and forgive him, not allowing those wounds to continue to harm you. Remember that these wounds damage all of your relationships: with God, with your spouse, with your children, with others. Don't let the absent father pattern repeat itself. Remember that you aren't responsible for the choices of others, but it's in your hands to take charge of your life.

### 10.3 Conclusions

As we have seen, the physical absence of the father due to death or divorce is easier to explain to the child, and he assimilates it better. The minor finds external variables that justify that his father, against his will and preference, has to be distanced. However, we have studied that emotional absence is much more complicated for the child to understand; it's more harmful and difficult to overcome (even when he is an adult). Let's think about it: how to explain that dad is there, but as if he wasn't there?

As S. Sanchis (2022) points out, change towards a significant improvement of any vital maladjustment is always possible. The fundamental requirement for a fruitful process of personal change to be initiated in the absent father is that he himself becomes aware of his situation and wishes to change it.

### My commitment to God.

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### Reflection exercises and practical application.

1. Take a self-assessment to see if you're an absent parent. Which of the characteristics of an absent parent are in you? Review the features studied here.

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2. If you identified some characteristics present in you as an absent father, plan to become a present father who assumes his responsibilities as a father with excellence.

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## Lesson 11. **Your job matters to God**

**Bible Text:** **John 5:17**

*"My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working."*

### Objectives:

- **Understand** that work is a blessing from God.
- **View** the workplace as a mission field.
- **Prepare** a project for your life at work.

### 11.1 Introduction

One of the enemy's common traps is to make us believe that we must compartmentalize the different aspects of our life. Thus, we learn that there is a work life, a family life, a spiritual life, and even a leisure life. The tendency to separate these aspects of life so that there's little or no overlap between them may be appropriate in some cases. For example, it's not good to take work home so that it interferes with our family relationships. On the other hand, the pursuit of leisure shouldn't affect the time we spend with God either.

However, that restriction shouldn't apply to the role that our spiritual life should play in our entire existence. The work of the Christian arises from communion and work with God. Work is a way in which we can practice the presence of God. To compartmentalize our religious life, to limit God to one day, one hour, or even one aspect of life, is to reject God's presence in these other aspects.

How should I perceive my work? What does God want me to do through the job I have?

### 11.2 Development

#### 11.2.1 Work in the Bible

Many times, we have the distorted thought that work is like a curse, that it only serves to generate money. But in this lesson, we're going to see God's perspective on work and we're going to have a broader vision of what God can do in us and through us in our work.

- God is a worker. He works and rests from his work. And he still works. John 5:17
- Work was God's idea. In the ideal world before sin, God gave Adam and Eve the task of caring for the Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:15).
- Through work, we not only glorify God, we also provide for our families and contribute to our communities (Deut. 14:28-29; Eph. 4:28).
- Work is a blessing. God put the first human couple in the Garden of Eden to cultivate and care for it.

- God has given us “the work of [our] hands” so that we can find satisfaction and joy (see Prov. 10:4; 12:14).
- Work is our source of support. *“For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: “The one who is unwilling to work shall not eat.”* (2 Thess. 3:10).
- Through work we honor God. Col. 3:23-24 *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It’s the Lord Christ you are serving.”*

**One of the most revolutionary concepts we can acquire is that all work is important to God, not just spiritual work like that of a pastor or missionary. We have been created in the image of God and as such we’re co-creators and do God’s work together with him. J.D. Greear**

Why is it important to connect our work with our faith? Marcelo Robles presents us with some reasons:

- Because the Bible talks a lot about work.
- Because at least a third of our life is spent working
- Because work is a central factor in the consideration that people have about happiness (unemployment, lack of legal coverage, informal employment, etc.).
- Because the world of work has been the protagonist of the great social changes in the world.
- Because our Christian mission often hasn’t yet impacted our world of work.

### **11.2.2 Are you tired of your job?**

There are many people who don’t like the work they do. Maybe it’s not the job they dreamed of, or even prepared for. But this shouldn’t be a frustration for us. Without ceasing to yearn to be better, we must keep in mind what God says through Paul: *“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters”* Col. 3:23

So, within the transformation of our being that we have been insisting on throughout this Manual, we must ask God to also transform the perception we have of our work. For now, while that happens, we can share with you the following ideas that will help you move in that direction.

- Offer your work to God (Prov. 16:10).
- Ask Jesus to be with you at work.
- Value the opportunities to be salt and light in that place.
- Innovate something so that your work is better valued.
- God can use you to bless that source of work and those who work there.

If through your work you earn the livelihood of your family, bless others, and take the opportunity to testify, this in itself is already enough reason to enjoy it. But even more important, according to what we saw in Col. 3:22-24

**There is no division between the secular and the sacred. Everything belongs to Jesus. J.D. Greear**

Remember that Joseph was sent to jail, Daniel was thrown into the lions' den, the young men who served with him were thrown into the furnace, but God kept them. God is still faithful. Stand firm and don't be surprised at what God can do through you to magnify His Kingdom, even in that job that today may not be to your liking. In the end, that's what it's all about: being an instrument to magnify His Kingdom and not our own.

### **11.2.3 Don't let work become your god**

We have mentioned that work is a mandate; it's a blessing and an opportunity for development. However, we must take care that overwork doesn't become a problem.

There are people who would rather be working overtime than to be with their family. The Bible teaches that man should enjoy a rest after his work Ec. 2:24. There is an addiction to work. That speaks of what is in his heart. No doubt that creates an imbalance in the person. He can be an absent father, never having time for

his children, or for his wife. He will hardly have time to attend church and be actively involved in some ministry, although he sometimes wants to feel understood by giving good gifts to the children, or financially supporting the church.

**Idolatry occurs when something matters more to you than the glory of God." Whether it's success, money, or the praise of others, one makes decisions to achieve those goals instead of honoring God. J.D. Greear**

Let's be people focused on God's purpose for our lives. Work isn't something we should be complaining about continuously. But neither should we go to the other extreme of idolizing it, as sometimes happens. Let's reflect on Ec. 2:4-11. After Solomon recounts all his work and the great wealth he accumulated, he ends by saying:

*"Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun" (v.11).*

Lastly, Edith Esquivel (2020) mentions that because of their work, they run out of time for other things. The lack of time, mentions Edith Esquivel, constitutes a type of poverty. People are exhausted and this impacts them in various ways:

It affects their satisfaction with life:



- It causes them, anxiety and depression.
- They laugh less, have less fun.
- They have poorer health.
- They divorce more often.
- Their productivity at work is reduced.

**Lack of time is also  
a type of poverty.  
Edith Esquivel**

### 11.2.4 Aspects to consider when choosing a job

Since work is important to God, we have a responsibility to reflect on what is the best job for us. When deciding about a new job, we must consider some aspects such as:

- **Type of work:** Is the work I do satisfactory? Is my position according to my tastes and talents? Do I feel that my work is useful?
- **Relationship with my superiors:** Do I feel good toward my boss? Are they satisfied with my work?
- **Employees:** Do they collaborate in a good climate? Do they meet their objectives according to their abilities?
- **Salary:** Do I receive adequate remuneration for my work? Do I feel compensated in other ways besides financially?
- **Recognition:** Is my work valued? Is this recognition expressed or manifested in some way?
- **Hours:** Do I work an appropriate number of hours? Does the schedule allow me to reconcile my work life with all of the other parts of my life?
- **Workplace:** Are the facilities adequate to work safely and comfortably? Is it a motivating place?
- **Commuting time:** Do I feel like I spend too much time commuting?

Work is so important in human life that models have been developed to assess the quality of working life. We invite you to self-evaluate how you feel in your current job through the model that we're going to present to you below.

Walton developed a model with eight factors that affect the quality of working life, which are:

Factor to determine the quality of working life	Score (0 to 100)
1. Fair and adequate compensation: the distributive justice of the compensation depends on the adequacy of the remuneration for the work that the person performs, internal and external equity.	
2. Safety and health conditions at work: includes the dimensions of work hours and physical environment appropriate to the health and well-being of the person.	
3. Employment and capacity development: provide opportunities to meet the employment needs, skills and knowledge of the worker, develop their autonomy, self-control and obtain information.	
4. Opportunities for continued growth and security: provide career opportunities in the organization, personal growth and development, and job security.	
5. Social integration in the organization: elimination of notorious hierarchical barriers, mutual support, interpersonal frankness and absence of preconceived ideas.	
6. Regulation: refers to the establishment of norms and rules of the organization, rights and duties of the worker, appeals against arbitrary decisions and a democratic climate.	
7. Work and total living space: work shouldn't absorb all the time and all the energy of the worker, it's detrimental to his family and private life.	
8. Social importance of life at work: work should be a social activity that makes the person proud.	

To select a future job, we invite you to carry out the following exercise:

### Vision

- What's the vision you have of yourself in 5 years?
- Where would you like to go?
- What do you want to achieve as a professional?
- What would you like to do if you had all the facilities at your fingertips?
- What job would you like to have?
- What kind of company would you like to work for?
- What would be your professional development (goals)?

## Diagnosis

- Are you in the place you want and deserve?
- Do you feel that what you do is your true mission?
- How many more years do you see yourself in this professional situation?
- Is what you do aligned with what you value?
- What are your priorities today and now?
- What are your current skills?
- Should you continue preparing to improve your professional career?

**Instead of worrying ahead, let's think and plan ahead. Winston Churchill**

## 11.3 Conclusions

Our work is part of our life, which we shouldn't separate into "the secular", thinking that what we do there isn't spiritual. The Word teaches us that everything we do must be done for God.

So, we must reassess the perspective we have on our work. Work is more than a way to get money, it's an opportunity to develop my vocations, gifts and talents. There, too, God can use us to pour out his grace.

If you're tired of your job, reassess the advantages and disadvantages. If it's a job that allows you to have time for your family and for your ministry, it's undoubtedly a job that already has points in favor. It's true that sometimes the work environment is difficult. In any case, what we have to do is improve our social skills to improve our relationship with others and be a bearer of God's grace in the workplace.

### My commitment to God.

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**Reflection exercises and practical application.**

1. What's your attitude towards your work? In what ways could you use your work to be a greater blessing to others?

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2. How do you manifest your spirituality in the daily tasks of life? What kind of impression do you think you leave?

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3. For each of the passages below, answer: What does this passage teach us about how we should live?

Passage	What does this passage teach us about how we should live?	How could we turn this into a principle for doing business?
Jeremiah 22:13, 17		
James 5:1-8		
Proverbs 22:16		
1 Tess. 4:11-12		
Proverbs 11:1-4		
Matthew 7:12		
Proverbs 6:6-11		
1 Tim. 6:6-10, 17-19		

4. In your work life, how has God used you for His purposes?

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## Lesson 12. *Biblical principles for managing finances: Using GPS to take you to your final destination*

*Bible Text: Matthew 6:24*

*No one can serve two masters. Either you will hate the one and love the other, or you will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money.*

### Objectives:

- **Evaluate** if you comply with the principles given by God for the wise management of your finances.
- **Develop** a plan to correct what is necessary, based on the diagnosis made about compliance with God's principles.
- **Ask for the guidance** of the Holy Spirit to implement the necessary changes in your life and to lead the changes in your family.

## 12.1 Introduction

If our family is going through a difficult financial situation, one of the important questions that must be asked is, **How did we get here?** We must be aware that we have possibly violated what God has asked us to do. Perhaps we have listened and attended to the voices of society that dictate how we should be.

In every culture, we have principles that can be in favor of what God asks of us in His Word. But we must be alert and recognize that the culture of this world will usually lead us to violate the Word of God, putting pressure on us and our families.

Unfortunately, we fall because of the enemy who offers us many kinds of satisfactions or persuades us to take a fast path to obtain money, or tells us that if we lower the quality or quantity of what we sell a little, we'll have more money. He usually tells us in our ears, "Look, the others are doing it so why not you?" But God says, "Believe in me." Jesus asks us to seek first the things of the Kingdom, and God will supply our needs.

## 12.2 Development

### 12.2.1 God's purpose in us

When meditating on the principles that God has given us regarding the healthy management of our finances and assets, it reminds me of the figure of a journey or a career (perhaps with many obstacles). We're here passing through with the purpose of:

- Preaching His Word
- Teaching others about Christ
- Serving others in love

- Communing with my family in Christ and
- Worshiping God in all that I do, think, and am.

As the apostle Paul established, we must keep in mind that we're going towards a defined goal which is represented as the crown of life (Phil. 3:14). So, if we want to follow Jesus' model, we must ask for the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that every decision in our life, particularly in the area of finances on this occasion, is aligned to fulfill what God wants us to do. If I carry it out, I will be honoring God and fulfilling His purpose for me and my family.

### **12.2.2 Biblical principles seen as a navigation chart**

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

To use a GPS, it's enough to tell it where we're going and let it know our current location. Then, that system begins to process information and usually marks the shortest route for us. As I move forward, if for any reason I stray from the path, the GPS has the ability to speak to me (literally) and tell me how I can get back on the route to the originally set destination. Even more, the GPS has the opportunity to warn of possible problems that I may encounter if I continue on a certain route.

**Connect your divine GPS and always keep it turned on towards the goal, the supreme reward.**

That's what God gave us through his Word, written from him so that we know where to go. But not only that, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, he added "voice" to it as well. So, our recommendation is that while we head towards the heavenly goal, we must always be in the best relationship with God. That will help us to be sensitive to the direction that the Holy Spirit wants to give us. Seen in this way, it changes our way of thinking about the statutes of God. He's the main one interested in each of us reaching the goal.

So, I hope you're ready to get back on track and are motivated to restart your journey to the heavenly goal. That's why we present in the following section those principles that God has for us to undertake the safe journey while being under his care. Review them and commit to following them. Then expect great things from God in your life

**God is the main one interested in us reaching the goal and obtaining the award or crown of life. For this he gave us instructions in his Word on how to do it and he gives us his Holy Spirit to redirect us if necessary.**

### 12.2.3 Biblical principles regarding finances

In this section we're going to reference the biblical principles cited by A. Rodríguez (2016). To explain it in a simpler way, let's think about what has been established in the previous Unit regarding "earn as much as you can, save as much money as you can, and give as much as you can" (Suárez, 2015).

#### A. Earn as much as you can

In doing so, we must consider the following principles:

1. **God is the one who supplies our needs (Phil. 4:19).** Let's recognize that God cares for us if we seek Him and walk according to His statutes. But it's necessary to be good stewards of what He puts in our hands. Let's not lose sight of the fact that it's God who gives us the power, abilities, and opportunities to generate wealth (Dt. 8:18).
2. **Work to get what is necessary to provide for your family (Prov. 14:23).** The Bible points out that the man is responsible for supplying for the needs of the family. We must strive to find a job that allows us to earn enough to support our family. The Bible also establishes that we must give to the needy. Unfortunately, nowadays mothers also have to go out and pay the bills. Sometimes the mother must work as the family's primary breadwinner.
3. **Don't be lazy (Prov. 20:13).** The Bible asks us to work hard to obtain the necessary resources to supply at home. This should be well thought out by whoever is without studying or working. Don't let laziness be your lifestyle. Whoever behaves in this way shouldn't expect God to supply him in his day of need, but rather he will come to poverty. We recommend you study the book of Proverbs in this regard, which includes multiple quotes such as: Pr. 6:6; 13:4; 18:9; 20:4; 21:25; 26:13,14,16.
4. **Do not want to make money improperly (Hab. 2:9).** From the beginning (Ex. 18:21), God warns us about not wanting to gain at the cost of violating his principles. Sometimes we'll be tempted to participate in some fraud at work, to provide a service that doesn't comply with what is offered, etc. That's sin before God and it only shows where our heart is. (Tit. 1:7; 1st Tim. 3:3; 1st. Peter 5:2).
5. **Treat your workers with dignity (Dt. 24:14,15).** God in His just laws has established that it's a sin to abuse our workers by paying them less, not paying them on time (Lev. 19:13), subjecting them to excessive work, or worse still, leaving them without pay (Jer. 22:13). None of this is tolerated by God. Remember that He is God of justice, and the cry of those workers will rise before Him (James 5:4),
6. **Do not practice usury (Lev. 25:35-38).** God established laws to protect those most in need. In the case of the poor who need to borrow to survive, God commands that no interest be charged. But, at other times He does allow it. Today there are fellow Christians or other people who want a loan to start a business, to take a trip, etc. In those cases, interest can be charged without reaching high costs for the use of money. Comparing the rate of other sources of financing (banks, etc.) can help you avoid making an unfair deal (Mt. 25:27)

## B. Save as much as you can

In doing so, we must consider the following principles:

1. **Work based on a budget (Prov. 27:23, 24).** This will help us control expenses, see the amount of income we need to meet the needs, as well as plan what's necessary to achieve the established goals that require financial resources (children's education, health, retirement plan, etc.). In Luke 14:24-30, our Lord Jesus tells us about estimating the expenses that we'll incur when building a building before starting, to make sure we have what's necessary to finish it. The same teaching is applied to the maintenance of our home.
2. **Supply for the needs of the family (1 Tim. 5:8).** That's our first responsibility. Usually this corresponds to the man, but if we remember the passage of the virtuous woman (Prov. 31:13,14,16), we see how sometimes the woman also has to contribute to the family economy. The case of those marriages that were dissolved and then the father refuses to give to support the children they had or doesn't contribute enough for that support deserves special mention. It's embarrassing that they have to be sued to fulfill their parental responsibility which they haven't lost despite being now divorced. The current context in which there are many single-parent families, most headed by the mother, should also be considered. If the father isn't responsible for her, she must replace him.
3. **Learn to save for each stage and need (Prov. 21:20).** Within the budget we must include the item of savings. Sometimes eventualities such as loss of work, illness, accidents, etc. may occur and we must be prepared for them. In addition, we must save for our children's school, the purchase of a house, etc. Pr. 6:6-8 and 30:25 teaches us that we must also save for when the time of our retirement arrives. Pr. 13:22 asks us to leave an inheritance to our children.
4. **Do not be covetous (Prov. 28:22; Lk. 12:15).** Greed consists of an inordinate desire to possess and acquire wealth in order to hoard it. That denotes a serious spiritual problem. Distinguish wisely between being thrifty and being miserly. Consider further that in Col. 2:5, covetousness is considered idolatry.
5. **Learn to live contentedly (1 Tim. 6:7, 8).** For many it's difficult to live contentedly. The Bible says that if we have food and clothing, we should thank God with contentment. This doesn't imply that you don't have the desire to improve your financial situation. What God asks is that we recognize his Lordship in our lives and focus on heavenly goals rather than earthly ones. Discontent can lead you to live bitterly, to be easy prey for the enemy making you think that God is unfair to you. Learn to be happy even in the midst of less.
6. **Do not contract debts that you aren't able to pay (Prov. 22:7).** Debts represent a way of enslaving ourselves to the person or company that lent to us. We must be wise to see how much we can pay before acquiring a good or service. Paul tells us in Rom. 13:8 to owe no one anything. We will delve more into this topic in Unit III. Also

consider the high cost of interest charged for servicing the debt. For example, someone who buys a new car for three years usually ends up paying a premium of 60% or more of the basic cost of the car.

7. **Avoid being a compulsive shopper (Prov. 21:5).** We must be very cautious in our purchases. To the extent possible, purchases such as an appliances, etc. should be planned. Let's take care not to be irrational when wanting to buy just because there are various promotions in the store such as: monthly installments without interest, "night sales," "start paying in three months," etc. Look for the dates or seasons where discounts really exist. Always look to get at least three different quotes for the purchases to be made. There are consumer studies out there and they won't hesitate to use them to get you to end up buying something you didn't plan to buy, maybe you don't need, or to get you to buy something you could buy at a better price if you didn't let yourself be led away by your emotions
8. **Don't love money (1 Tim. 6:10).** When we love money, we're at great risk of losing our salvation. We totally lose focus on seeking God and concentrate on earning more money, even if we already have enough. In Eccl. 5:12, it tells us that the rich don't sleep because they're thinking about how to earn more money. That desire will dominate us and we'll violate other principles in order to earn more money through illicit gains, unfair payments (James 5:4), etc. We cannot serve God and money.
9. **Don't be a guarantor or guarantee for other people (Prov. 17:18).** The Bible warns us that if the person for whom you are guarantor cannot pay their debt, the debt will be charged to you. That will lead you to have losses, which can sometimes even be from the house where you live with your family. The recommendation is that you only do it in small quantities according to your economic capacity. Only cosign if the amount isn't going to get your own family finances in trouble. Also consider what the guarantor is going to buy. Is it a luxury or a necessity? Read Proverbs: 6:1-5; 11:15 a.m.; 17:18: 22:26; 27:13
10. **Fulfill your obligations (Psalms 37:21).** Review who you owe and pay each debt owed. The Christian must honor their word. We can see in Ro. 13:7, 8 which states that we must owe nothing to others. Unfortunately, there are people who are already in the habit of borrowing but aren't responsible in paying it back. Many friendships have ended because of this lousy behavior. Also include in your list those debts that you have incurred when buying a good or service. The wicked borrows and doesn't pay (Ps. 37:21). So always keep the attitude of paying back what you have been borrowed and do it as soon as you can.
11. **Don't worry about money (Matt. 6:25-34).** God asks us to trust that He will supply what we need. For this he establishes as a condition that we seek first the Kingdom of God and his justice. Make sure you're loving God with all your strength, with all your mind, and with all your heart.

### C. Give all you can

In doing so, we must consider the rules established by J. Wesley:

- a) Give God His due.
- b) Give to support the Work of God.
- c) Give for the needs of others.

For this we can:

1. **Fulfill our tithes and offerings (Mal. 3:8).** God has established that as administrators of what He gives us, we must set aside 10% to cover the necessary expenses that are generated in the church. Currently it can be used to support the pastor (Matt. 10:10; 1 Cor. 9:1-15), cover the expenses generated by the various ministries such as preaching and discipleship, payment of services such as water, light, telephone, etc. Also, to make improvements to the facilities, as well as to acquire necessary equipment such as musical instruments, furniture, etc. Since it's about refocusing on who we're to be, it's important that our tithe becomes a proof of our love for God and one of the many ways we worship him. It's also an act of faith because, although our family economy is low, we're showing that we believe that He will supply our needs.
2. **Contribute for the ministry (1 Cor. 6:2).** There are other offerings that go to various funds such as evangelism, support for missionaries, support for the construction of temples and pastoral houses. There are also funds for disaster relief, sponsoring children, among others. According to our possibilities, each one will be able to contribute so that the Kingdom of God continues to spread. Jesus helps us see that, even if little is offered, He sees our heart more than how much we give (Mc. 12:43,44).
3. **Be generous to meet the needs of others when possible (Luke 6:38).** Throughout the Bible we're taught that out of love for our neighbor we must meet the needs of people in greatest need. Jesus challenges us to give abundantly and with joy (2 Cor. 9:7). The early church showed their love by supplying for the needs of the poor in Jerusalem (Acts 4:32-37). In 1 John 1:17, we see that sharing with those in need is a tangible sign of our love for them. It can also be used to meet the needs of unconverted people looking for God, speaking to their hearts through our love. Wesley insisted that our holiness is relational and must be shown in daily action towards others and materialize in actions that show our love for our neighbor. This will sometimes involve helping them with some of their needs. "Methodists gave to the poor, lived with the poor, and gave preference to the poor" (LeClerk, 2002).

If your income isn't enough to cover expenses, it's time to evaluate why. Albert Einstein said: *"If you want to get different results, don't continue doing the same thing."* Andrés Panasiuk (2011, 12) paraphrases it like this: *"The only way to improve our current economic situation is to move towards a higher level of ideas and values than that level that led us to where we are today."*

## 12.3 Conclusions

Since the Bible has thousands of passages that talk about money or material goods, it's undoubtedly because we need to be educated in how we manage resources. We need both knowledge and wisdom to manage family resources well.

There are two aspects that we need to keep firmly fixed in our minds and our hearts. Before following a series of steps to improve our family finances (doing), we must focus on being transformed and guided by God to fulfill His purpose in our lives (Panasiuk, 2006: p.13).

### My commitment to God.

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### Reflection exercises and practical application.

- Just like when we go to the doctor, either for a health problem or for a study to assess our current state, there will always be a series of points that check us out. Analyze the principles studied and see how you're applying them to your family or person:

Principle to analyze	From 0 to 100, how well do you apply it?	What do you think are the causes of not applying it well (if that were the case)?	What can you do to apply this command of God better?
P #1			
P #2			
P #3			
P #4			
P #5			
P #6			
P #7			
P #8			

P #9			
P #10			
P #11			
P #12			
P #13			
P #14			
P #15			
P #16			
P #17			
P #18			
P #19			
P #20			

2. Explain what our Lord Jesus meant when he said: "You cannot serve God and mammon" (Matthew 6:24).

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