



Discipleship and Sunday School Ministries
(SDMI)

A photograph of a man from behind, standing in a field of tall green grass. He has his arms raised in a gesture of praise or prayer. The sky is a mix of blue, orange, and yellow, suggesting a sunset or sunrise. The overall mood is peaceful and spiritual.

Adult Ministries
Lessons for Men 2021

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Study Guide for Men

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Presentation

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

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

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

Spiritual area:

- Motivate men to be consecrated under the direction of the Holy Spirit.
- Do personal evangelism with other men.
- Strengthen worship of God and a devotional life.

Ministerial area:

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

Family area:

- Build your home on the principles and values of the Kingdom of God manifested in the Bible.
- Apply biblical principles and values for a good marriage relationship.
- Apply biblical principles and values for raising children.

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

Learning Objectives.

They refer to the achievements expected of the men upon completion of the lesson study.

Introduction.

It's an initial presentation that contextualizes the topic to be addressed, in order to put the presenter in the background.

Development of the theme.

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

Conclusion of the main teaching.

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

Dynamics or activities.

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

Lesson 1. Created with a Purpose

Biblical Text: Ephesians 2:10

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

Objectives:

- **Understand** that God blesses us when we honor him.
- **Understand** that God designed us with a specific purpose.
- **Evaluate** is we are accomplishing that purpose.
- **Recognize** that God gives us opportunities to align ourselves with his purpose.
- **Value** how we can prepare ourselves to complete God's purpose.

1.1 Introduction

At all times, humans have sought to find the meaning of his life. This search has been the object of study in philosophy, psychology, sociology, religion and ethics. You can go searching on the Internet and you'll find that there are thousands of references from various perspectives regarding the meaning of life.

Since many people don't have their sense of life defined, they go aimlessly through this world. Some focus on being happy, seeking to build their own definition of happiness. This is something of great importance, because according to the meaning they give to life, it's expected that everything they do will be dedicated to achieving that purpose.

In this regard, you'll find all kinds of opinions on social networks today. There are those who believe that life consists of giving yourself pleasure. They identify themselves with phrases such as: "you live only once, so dedicate yourself to enjoying life." Others believe that happiness is in accumulating wealth and they spend their lives in search of accumulating possessions. For them the phrase "how much you have, how much are you worth" predominates.

The sociologist Gilles Lipovetsky, explains that the postmodern subject, not knowing where to direct the meaning of it, has focused on himself, seeking immediate enjoyment based on the activity of the moment. This makes it difficult for him to make long-term plans. There are also those who go with an existential void after accumulating heavy failures or losses and express phrases such as "life is not worth it."

As Christians it's vitally important to know what God's purpose is for each of us. That's why we're going to study this lesson by answering the following questions biblically:

- "Who I am?" This is an identity question.
- "Where did I come from?" This is a question of origin.

- "Why I am here?" This is a question of purpose.
- "Where am I going?" This is a destination question.

1.2 Development

1.2.1 Created by God with a purpose

In Ephesians 1:11, we read that *"In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will."*

Rick Warren (2002) finds three great truths:

1. We find our purpose and identity by having a relationship with Christ.
2. God thought of you and me long before we thought of Him, even before we were born. He planned great things for our life. "You can choose your career, your spouse, your hobbies and many other components of your life, but you don't have to choose your own design."
3. That purpose is part of the plan that God planned for our eternity.

<p>God doesn't play dice. <i>Albert Einstein</i></p>

R. Warren (2002) himself reminds us that we're not a mere accident. God designed every feature of our body. He chose each detail in a personalized way. *"He made your body to measure, just as He wanted it ... He arranged all the natural talents that you possess and the uniqueness of your personality."* Psalm 139:13-16

That's why we must meditate on what's guiding our life:

- The accumulation of wealth?
- The need to be accepted by others?
- Trying to be more than others?
- Seeking my own pleasure?
- Resentment from past hurts?
- Fulfill God's purpose for our life?

1.2.2 Benefits of having a purpose in life

When we discover the purpose that God has for you or me, many benefits are added to our lives. Some of them are (Warren, 2002):

- We find the meaning of our life, which is like having a lighthouse that guides us.
- It simplifies decision-making in our life. Knowing my purpose, I already know what I should do and shouldn't do. Paul describes it like this:

"Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead." (Phil. 3:13)

- It stimulates our life. Moving towards the goal always encourages us. Paul explains it like this: *"I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus."* (Phil. 3:14)

- It prepares us for eternity. One day, we'll give an accounting to Christ of what we did with our life, time, resources and everything He gave us.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad." (2 Cor. 5:10)

1.2.3 A general purpose

Usually, people tend to be influenced by what the world dictates. It defines the rules of how to be a successful person. For example, we mentioned that there are those who are focused on owning material things, while others want to have prestige within their professional field. There are also those who are addicted to power.

But we must meditate on what God has in store for us. For it depends on how we'll be evaluated when we appear before Christ on the Great White Throne (2 Cor. 5:10).

Rick Warren (2002) identifies the following as an essential part of our purpose in life. The biblical foundations are found in the Great Commission and the Great Commandment:

- (Preach) Share the message of salvation in Christ with others.
- (Educate) Teach them biblical truths.
- (Serve) Serve others in love.
- (Fellowship) Be part of a community, where you support each other.
- (Worship) Worship God in all possible ways, at all times.

"Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age." (Matt. 28:18-20)

"For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned." Then some of the Pharisees and teachers of the law said to him, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from you." He answered, "A wicked and adulterous generation asks for a sign! But none will be given it except the sign of the prophet Jonah." (Matt. 12:37-39)

1.2.4 A specific purpose

God also has specific things that He wants you and me to accomplish in this life. In the Jeremiah 1:5 passage, we can see that even before his birth, God had chosen Jeremiah to be a prophet.

"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart; I appointed you as a prophet to the nations." (Jer. 1:5)

The call is the invitation that God makes to us to live according to his will for our lives, developing the potential that's in us. This will be studied in the next lesson.

1.2.5 How can I prepare better for my purpose?

The first step is to recognize Christ as your personal Savior. We invite you to do this if you haven't done it yet. Next, we suggest that you join a Christian church to be taught biblical truths.

On your own, you can begin to pray at home, read the Bible, fast, worship him through songs, seek to spend time with God. You can honor God also through serving others. God will show you your gifts and open doors for you according to the purpose he has for your life.

1.3 Conclusions

Saint Augustine said: "Our hearts are restless until they meet God." You and I cannot experience peace and joy in our lives if we don't have a relationship with God. When we've accepted Christ as our personal Savior, His Holy Spirit begins to work in our lives and equips us to do God's will.

Our time on earth will be short compared to the eternity that awaits us. Therefore, we must be aware that we cannot continue wasting time without knowing God's purpose for our lives and taking the necessary actions.

In that intimate relationship that we must seek day by day, the fullness of His Spirit causes us to want to worship Him; it moves us to avoid falling back into sin. It also prompts us to serve others out of love for God. His love will drive us to share the message of salvation with others, thus fulfilling the purpose of being salt and light for all those around us, starting with our family.

Proposed activities:

1. Are you already clear about God's purpose? If the answer is yes, try to describe it.
2. Are you living a life according to God's purpose? Explains how.
3. What can you do to know God's purpose for your life? What will you do to fulfill it in the best way?

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Lesson 2. **God's Call for each of us**

Biblical Text: Ephesians 4:11-12

So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up.

Objectives:

- **Identify** the ministry to which God has called you
- **Become aware** of the need to prepare ourselves to serve in the Kingdom
- **Decide** to heed the call that God makes us

2.1 Introduction

In the previous lesson, we talked about purpose in the life of a Christian. We distinguish that there are two types of purposes: a general one for every Christian and a specific one for each one. In this lesson, we're going to look at the second type of purpose, which is also known as the calling of God.

All Christians have a vocation, we have gifts, and we are called to ministry. The gifts are varied and necessary for the mission of the church (Matthew 28:19-20). By discovering our gifts, we can train ourselves for service.

Ministry in general is all church work that we do to serve God and others, that is, all work we do to make Christ known. For that we use our gifts and abilities. God's call to ministry is for everyone.

2.2 Development

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. ¹⁰ Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." (1 Peter 2:9-10)

It's important for every Christian to understand that:

- God is the one who calls us.
- God has a calling for everyone.
- No matter your age, gender, or preparation, God continues to call you.
- God gives us gifts to be able to carry out ministry.

2.2.1 What do I do to identify my call?

God has gifted us to participate in the building of His Kingdom. According to the gift(s) you have received, it will be the ministry to which he has called you. However, some are unclear if God has called them to a specific full-time ministry. It will help you see how God shows His servants that He is honoring them by calling them to serve Him in ministry.

- In the case of Esther (4:14), God used her relative Mordecai to show and confirm her calling in the face of the threat faced by the Jewish people.

"For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?"

- He can also call out to His servants through the audible voice of the Holy Spirit, as he did with Samuel (1 Samuel 3:8-9).

"A third time the LORD called, "Samuel!" And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, "Here I am; you called me." Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ So Eli told Samuel, "Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, 'Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.'" So Samuel went and lay down in his place."

- On other occasions God called his servants through appearing to them in a vision, as in the cases of Moses (Exodus 3:4) and Paul (Acts 3:3-6).

"As he went further along the road, it came to pass that, as he came near Damascus, he was suddenly surrounded by a blaze of light from heaven; and falling to the ground, he heard a voice saying to him: Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? He said: Who are you, Lord? And he said to him: I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting; it's hard for you to kick against the stinger. He, trembling and fearful, said: Lord, what do you want me to do? And the Lord said to him: Get up and go into the city, and you will be told what to do."

The gifts that God has given you will be visible as you perform your service in the work (1 Cor. 12:4-10). In general, a person called to serve in ministry enjoys very much what he does when serving in the work of God. What we must emphasize here is that God can use various methods to call each person.

2.2.2 Can you reject God's call?

Without a doubt, the enemy will seek to make you desist from fulfilling the ministry for which God has called you. Throughout the Bible, we can find various excuses made by great people who God called.

- When Moses was called by God, he made various excuses:

- 1) I'm not a person who has something special. (Ex. 3:11)
- 2) I can't speak well for the people of God. (Ex. 4:10)
- 3) They won't believe me. (Ex. 4:2)

"But Moses said, 'Pardon your servant, Lord. Please send someone else.'" (Ex. 4:13)

- In Jeremiah's case we can see that he argued that he was too young.

"Alas, Sovereign LORD," I said, "I do not know how to speak; I am too young." (Jer. 1:6)

Then Jeremiah pretended not to follow God's will. But what he experienced, he describes as a fire that was embedded in his bones, as a passion that didn't let him sleep or be calm until he did something about his calling. The same happens to any person who has a call from God. They feel a strong desire, a strong passion or a fire that if they don't do something about it, they'll feel that they're dying.

But if I say, "I will not mention his word or speak anymore in his name, his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot." (Jer. 20:9)

- Jonah, for his part, was rebellious to God's call. He didn't want to go and preach the message of salvation to Nineveh, arguing that God was so good that He would forgive the Ninevites despite the great sins that they had committed.

"He prayed to the LORD, "Isn't this what I said, LORD, when I was still at home? That's what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity." (Jonah 4:2)

- Gideon argued that because he was from a small family, he couldn't answer the call.

"The LORD turned to him and said, "Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian's hand. Am I not sending you?" "Pardon me, my lord," Gideon replied, "but how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family." (Judges 6:14-15)

For each of them, God always gave an answer. So, what could your excuse be today for not heeding the call that God gives you? I encourage you to respond like Isaiah:

Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!" (Isaiah 6:8)

"For God's gifts and his call are irrevocable." (Rom. 11:29)

2.2.3 What would will be the cost of accepting your call?

Through your life, you'll show Jesus how much you value the sacrifice He made for you by laying His life on the cross because of our sins. This will sometimes imply that:

- You give up secular work that we like to do at some point.
- There will be possible misunderstanding by your family, as happened to Jesus.
- You give up our personal plans.
- You submit to a disciplined life.

"And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose." (Rom. 8:28)

2.2.4 What will be the reward for accepting your call?

Since the Kingdom of God is spiritual, our greatest gain will also be spiritual. It's already an honor to be called by God to ministry, so what we must do is respond to the call and let his Holy Spirit equip us spiritually.

Depending on the call:

- We will see people come with their lives shattered to be saved by God.
- We can participate in the restoration of families on the brink of separation.
- You could be sent to the nations to bring the good news of salvation.
- You could help build lives through disciple-making.
- In the midst of all this, God will give meaning to your life.

2.3 Conclusions

God has a divine purpose for each of us. It's our duty as God's children to take up the challenge and fulfill it in the best way, to glorify and bless his name and exalt him forever in our lives.

We must do anything we can to fulfill our calling. God isn't looking for people full of knowledge or skills. He's looking for people willing to take up his cross and follow him. What will be your answer?

Proposed activities:

1. Have you identified your specific call? If so, what is it?
2. What are the main barriers that you have faced in pursuing your call?
3. What is the biggest dream you have concerning serving God?

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Lesson 3. **What Does It Mean to be Discipled by Jesus?**

Biblical Text: 1 John 2:6 - "Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did."

Objectives:

- **Value that we belong to the Kingdom of God**
- **Explain what a disciple of Christ is.**
- **Analyze the characteristics of the disciples of Christ**
- **Work on the characteristics that define a disciple of Christ**

3.1 Introduction

It's of utmost importance to understand that when we accept Jesus as personal Savior, we're granted to be part of the Kingdom of God. This will bring us multiple benefits without a doubt, the greatest of which is being children of God.

But it's also important to note that, as children of God or citizens of His Kingdom, we have a number of responsibilities. These responsibilities are summed up in walking as Christ walked (1 John 2:6).

Therefore, it's very important to see what the model is that Christ left us during his earthly ministry. We see that same lifestyle also reflected in the first disciples that He called. If we persevere in leading this lifestyle as a result of the transformation that his Holy Spirit makes in us, we'll be able to obtain the great reward, also called the crown of life. That is, that perseverance will lead us to live eternal life with Jesus Christ after completing our earthly life.

3.2 Development

3.2.1 What is it to be a disciple of Christ?

A disciple is a person who adopts someone as a teacher and seeks to follow their teachings. So when we convert to Christ, it means that there will be a change in attitude towards sin, generating repentance, and consequently there will also be a change in our way of being.

It's very important to highlight, as explained by Ramón Sierra, that discipleship is a process of a spiritual nature. In order to be like Jesus, a series of spiritual exercises will be required of each one of us, including among others: prayer and fasting, study of his Word and meditation on it, service to others, among other disciplines.

3.2.2 Characteristics of a disciple of Christ

- He is **passionate** about Jesus. Luke 14:25-26

Large crowds were traveling with Jesus, and turning to them he said: "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple."

- He has an **intimate relationship** with Jesus. Matt. 6:6
But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you.
- They have been **transformed**. 2 Cor. 3:18
And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit.
- He is a believer who experiences the **filling of the Holy Spirit** and shows it through its fruit. Galatians 5:22-23
But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.
- He **loves** people extraordinarily. John 13:34-35
"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."
- He **shares the message of salvation** with others, starting with the members of his family. That's the first place where he testifies to his faith. Mark 16:15
He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to all creation."
- **Knows the Word of God**, reads it every day, and strives to obey and share it. Matthew 28:16-20
- **Lives according to the Word of God**. John 8:31-32
To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."
- He knows the **gifts** that God has given him and **puts them into practice** for the building of the Kingdom of God. 1 Peter 4:10
Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms.
- He **serves with passion** in a ministry. That's to say, he's actively involved in helping to spread the Kingdom of God. Mark 10:45
For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.
- He's **faithful to his church**; he has fellowship with his brothers and sisters. Acts 2:44-45
All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need.

3.3 Conclusion

We must not overlook that discipleship is a lifelong spiritual process. We cannot do what Jesus did in his earthly ministry if we don't first seek to be transformed by the Holy Spirit. From there, it's up to us to put into practice spiritual disciplines such as prayer, fasting, and study of the Word. Otherwise, we will be constantly stumbling until we reach the point of wanting to give up on following Jesus.

We emphasize that God has given us the blessing of having a family from our parents, and then forming our own. It's there that we must begin to put into practice all that Christ asks of us. It's our wife and children that we must begin loving the way we love ourselves. It's sad to hear comments from people who refer to "Christians" as a "street lamp, but darkness in the house." Fill your wife and your children with love. Don't spare any form or effort each day in giving them evidence of it.

It's in the family that we must start by sharing the good news of salvation. Never give up interceding for them in prayer. May no one in your family be left out of the plan of salvation in Christ.

It also works in your home. Take the opportunity to teach by your own example of how you can live in harmony when you work as a team that has the same direction or focus.

As a man, you have been called to be the head of your home. This carries with it the high responsibility of being the priest of your family. Let them see you study the Bible at home, set aside time to pray, get ready to go joyfully to the house of God or to serve in a ministry. "Infect them" with your example.

If you do all of this at home, when you leave it to go to your daily activities, you will have the desire that God will put in your heart to do it with all those who are around you throughout the day.

Proposed activities:

1. Name five actions with which you can show your love to others.
2. Name five actions you can use to show your worship of God.
3. Name five actions with which you can have intimate time with Christ.
4. What are five actions you can use to tell others about Christ?

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Lesson 4. **A Life Transformed In Christ**

Biblical Text: Acts 3:3-6

When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

Objectives:

- **Analyze** how God works in our lives to give us salvation.
- **Evaluate** what our life was like before accepting Christ as Savior.
- **Analyze** the transformation brought about in our lives by the Holy Spirit.

4.1 Introduction

I invite you to know the following stories of some who, after being faced with an encounter with Jesus, experienced a total transformation in their life, with the desire that they be a blessing to you. Let's look at the first character:

That was a day like any other, or so it seemed. Another "madman for Jesus" had been apprehended for blaspheming the Jewish faith. He spoke with such boldness that it was entirely convincing.

That man was Stephen, who spoke "such atrocities." He assured everyone that this Jesus was the Messiah promised to the Jews, and that what the prophets had said had been fulfilled in him. Saul burned with rage when he heard such statements. Who did Stephen think he was? Saul was one of the most educated Pharisees. With what authority did he dare to make such statements? Saul exhaled in relief when the Sanhedrin finally agreed to put him to death. Then one by one, those witnesses who accused him took off their cloaks so that they wouldn't interfere while they stoned Stephen, and they laid them at the feet of Saul, who witnessed that scene (Acts 6:8 - 8:2).

4.2 Development

4.2.1 Paul's Life Before Being Christ's Disciple

It's always interesting to see what our past life was like as a point of comparison to see if God has really been working in our life. So now we are going to analyze the life of our second character, the Apostle Paul, before and after meeting Jesus as his personal Savior.

- He was a descendant of the tribe of Benjamin, and therefore belonging to the Jewish diaspora. Saul, later known as Paul, had been sent by his parents to receive instruction from one of the greatest rabbinical teachers, Gamaliel.
- As a Pharisee, Paul knew the Torah in detail and jealously guarded the Jewish oral tradition. As a devotee of the Law, he repudiated Jesus' followers who claimed that He was the Messiah, attributing to him the role of Savior.

- His rabbinical studies didn't allow him to conceive the idea that there was any other means of salvation other than the Law. This led him to be a persecutor of the early church in order to eradicate those teachings that were opposed to its formation, and being sure that by doing this, he was pleasing God.
- Not satisfied that the new Christians had dispersed out of fear, Paul asked for letters authorizing him to go to the outskirts of the city to search for them, subdue them and imprison them with the use of force (Acts 26: 10-11).

4.2.2 The Conversion of Paul the Disciple

The original Greek word for "conversion" in the New Testament was used in Koine Greek times as "to return," "to turn," or "to become." Conversion means changing the direction we were going on the road to hell. By changing direction, we will be formed into the likeness of Jesus.

What was his conversion like? I must clarify that not all come to Jesus in the same way. But we must make sure that we have had a genuine conversion. In Paul's case, his conversion was in a very special way. It was on the road to Damascus that everything changed. Suddenly, a blinding radiance fell from the heavens and a voice asked him why he was chasing him. Totally astonished, Saul asked for clarification of who was speaking to him.

What a surprise it was when the voice identified himself as Jesus, the one whom Saul was persecuting. Then the voice reproached him for stubbornly resisting Him, for fighting against God Himself. Then Paul, his pride and ego collapsed in an instant, asked "Lord, what do you want me to do?" (Acts 9:3-6).

4.2.3 Transformation

Jesus' appearance to Saul ended his hostility and began a process of transformation. In the words of Veneroso (2018),

"The vision left him temporarily blind, but it finally opened his eyes, both physically and spiritually to this truth: we aren't saved by works of law, but by grace."

Here it's of great importance to emphasize that God is the one who transforms us through his Holy Spirit. God doesn't want us to simply obey a series of precepts, but to be transformed. That is, first we will be transformed and then we will do the good works for which we were called.

4.2.4 From Roman citizen to a citizen of heaven

Paul was a Roman citizen by birth (Acts 22:29). This was a privilege and a symbol of great status at that time that Paul had not had to strive to acquire.

A Roman citizen enjoyed certain rights and privileges anywhere in the Empire. He wasn't subject to the laws of the provinces where he lived, but to those of Rome. If he was accused of a crime, he had the right to be heard by a Roman court, and if he was sentenced to death, he could appeal to the emperor.

Paul's second citizenship was the one he obtained after his conversion, the citizenship of heaven. This citizenship, on the other hand, wasn't one that would have been easy for him to acquire. As Paul writes to the Philippians, it was one to constantly strive for. Even Paul himself worked daily to retain it and be worthy of it.

Celestial citizenship wasn't a citizenship that carried privileges before the authorities, nor was it a symbol of power. On the contrary, it was rejected by the way of life of many who behaved as enemies of the cross. With all this, it's possible to perceive how valuable this citizenship was for Paul and how much he longed for it after receiving Christ as his Savior (Phil. 3: 12-21).

4.2.5 From "Saved by Works" to "Saved by Grace"

From his early formation as a Jew and Pharisee, Paul learned to keep the Law as the means of salvation. It was the universal belief of his people that the Messiah would only come to a nation that kept the law, and Paul had set out to keep this commandment. However, after the event on the road to Damascus, Paul's thought underwent a total revolution.

Paul realized that (Stalker, 2019),

"The law had never been a way of salvation; it was only a means of illustrating the need for salvation. It had never been God's intent to allow man to fail in his true end, he only gave time to prove that fallen man could never achieve justification by his own efforts."

Paul understood that man's justification was impossible through the Law, and that for this reason the sacrifice of the cross had been necessary to obtain God's justification. Stalker (2019) states that

"This was the result of Christ's mission: to confer upon man, as a free gift, what is indispensable for his happiness, but which he himself has not been able to achieve. It's a divine act; it's grace."

Paul preached that people could obtain it by recognizing that they themselves could not achieve it. They must accept it from God through the faith in Jesus Christ.

4.2.6 From Persecutor to Persecuted

Ironically, Paul suffered as a Christian many punishments that he himself had imposed as a persecutor. From being an enemy and antagonist of Christianity who persecuted believers, Paul became an ambassador for Christ. For this reason, the Jews of Damascus were not slow in planning his death (Acts 9: 1-23).

According to Meyer (2019),

"The 'persecuted' saved their persecutor and made him their messenger, an apostle. From then on, a path of dedication to his Savior began in Paul's life. Paul understood what it meant to be a prisoner of Christ" (1 Corinthians 9: 1).

Paul had experienced the gift of grace, and he knew that his life's mission was to preach it to the Gentiles. This charge led him to suffer because of the name of the One whom he used to persecute. Without a doubt, his greatest passion after his conversion was to share Christ with others. For this reason, Paul saw every situation, even the most adverse, as an opportunity to continue talking about Christ.

In addition to being persecuted, he was imprisoned for his ministry on different occasions (Philippians 1:13). However, this never stopped him from continuing to spread the gospel. On the contrary, he used his time in prison to send letters to churches and pastors to help them correct their doctrinal errors and encourage them in the faith.

4.3 Conclusions

No simple words can describe the profound degree of transformation that occurred in Paul during his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. According to Acosta (2014),

“From that moment on, all his parameters of judgment and ethical-religious lesson change. Paul's religious history is marked by this spiritual experience that was so intense and profound that it irreversibly changed his entire life.”

There is a great contrast between Saul, the Roman citizen, and Paul, the citizen of heaven; between Saul, the one who affirmed that salvation could only be obtained through the Law, and Paul, who proclaimed that we can only be saved by the grace given through Jesus Christ; between Saul, the persecutor, and Paul, the imprisoned and persecuted missionary. There's no doubt that when we are transformed by the Holy Spirit, we can never be the same again.

We could close our story in a similar way to how we entered it. This was like any other day, or so it seemed. Another "madman for Jesus" had been apprehended for blaspheming the Jewish faith. The difference was that this one was more polite than the others, so much so that it almost seemed convincing. That man called Paul spoke of such atrocities. He assured them that this Jesus was the Messiah promised to the Jews, and that in Him what had been said by the prophets had been fulfilled

...

Now it's your turn. Have you already had that transformative encounter with Jesus? What was it like? Tell us your story.

Proposed activities:

1. Explain how you were saved.
2. What characteristics indicate that you have a transformed life in Christ?
3. Write a short personal testimony about what you were before and what you are now in Christ. Think about how you can share it with your friends and family so that they know Christ.

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Lesson 5. **Living the example of Christ**

Biblical Text: 1 Peter 4:1-11.

"They do not live the rest of their earthly lives for evil human desires, but rather for the will of God."

Objectives:

- **Evaluate** how we are living the standards of the Kingdom of God.
- **Know** that one day we will give an account of everything we do or don't do.
- **Value** the importance of putting into action the gifts that God has given to us.

5.1 Introduction

Once you are converted, you must bear in mind that you have started a long-term journey. In it, you will have to face many trials and difficulties. But above all else, you'll have the opportunity to experience the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that He will be with us every day. This should lead us to continually ensure that everything we do, be it in thought, word or action, leads us to the goal of winning the crown of life.

In this lesson, we're going to look at the standards that Christ has given us, which he modeled in his own life. It will serve as a basis for reflecting on what we have been doing about it. Given this, we'll look at the answers to questions such as: If my earthly life ended today, where would I go? What should I watch out for? What changes should I make in my life now?

5.2 Development

5.2.1 We must live according to the will of God.

Peter exhorts the Christians of the early church to leave their life of sin and live according to the will of God, that is, a holy life. The term "lusts of men" is used here.

According to Julián Pérez and María Merino (2016), this concept

"... is linked to morality and refers to the exaggerated desire to satisfy earthly desires. It can be said that lust is the excessive desire for carnal satisfaction. This appetite is the opposite of what is rational. Lust gratifies the senses."

According to Stanford (2018), several contrasts can be highlighted from this passage:

- between "the past time" of our life and "the time that remains in the flesh";
- between "the lusts of men" and "the will of God";
- between "the will of God" and "what is pleasing to the Gentiles"; and
- between "judged in the flesh according to men" and "live in spirit according to God."

Peter exhorts us to abandon the desires of men as the rule of our lives and take the will of God as the rule.

Peter recognizes that suffering is necessary, and reminds them that Christ has given us an example of this. To highlight the urgency of his exhortation, Peter affirms that the end is near, and instructs them on the correct attitude that Christians should show. Likewise, he reminds us of the importance of using our gifts correctly for the service of others and to glorify Christ.

5.2.2 Jesus gave us an example of suffering

In verse 3:18 of this letter, Peter mentions that Christ died in his body, therefore he suffered in the body. This refers to the human side of Jesus; it's a reminder that Christ, being fully God and fully human, suffered to set an example of a sinless life. Jesus lived on earth, focused on fulfilling God's will, putting aside his own desires. That's the model for us.

Peter tells us that we too must "assume the same attitude (NIV)." In his exhortation to live according to God's will, Peter invites us to look to Christ as an example and imitate his attitude. Doing the will of God will bring suffering, either from the rejection of others or from abstinence from things that cause pleasure and self-denial. However, doing God's will will bring life to the spirit.

5.2.3 Sin is left behind

In 4:3-4, Peter teaches us that doing what is pleasing to non-believers is a waste of time and asks that it be left in the past. Then, he lists a number of distinguishing characteristics of such unbelievers, reminding his readers that they once lived in such sin as well. Among them, he mentions that they dedicated their lives to vices and bad desires, got drunk, participated in scandalous parties and worst of all, they worshiped idols. When someone has stopped acting in this way and have turned away from it to God, this seems strange to unbelievers, and for that reason, they speak badly of Christians.

Matthew Henry warns us that tolerating one sin leads to another. Six are listed in this passage, and they have a connection and dependence on each other.

- 1) Lewdness or debauchery, expressed in looks, gestures or behavior.
- 2) Lusts, acts of lust, such as prostitution and adultery.
- 3) Drunkenness or excess wine and its excessive use.
- 4) Orgies or wild parties where you eat, drink, and act immodestly.
- 5) Carousing.
- 6) Abominable idolatry; the idol worship of the Gentiles was accompanied by lust, drunkenness, gluttony, and all manner of brutality and cruelty.

5.2.4 All of us are going to give an account (1 Peter 4:5-6)

Peter goes on to talk about non-believers when he says that they too will be held accountable, and that judgment will be for both the living and the dead.

Peter exhorts them to "live according to God as regards the Spirit." That is, they are to seek and carry out the will of God, bearing in mind that they will be judged and held accountable for their actions. According to Harper (2010), "the fact of responsibility before a holy judge is an incentive for holiness of heart and life."

5.2.5 The end is close

In addition to reminding us that we will be judged, Peter reminds us in 1 Peter 4:7-9 that the end is near. As stated by Harper (2010), the second coming of the Lord, the resurrection of the dead, and the final judgment were considered so close that Peter uses them as incentives for holy living. For this reason, he urges them to be sober, that is, attentive, with a clear mind and focused on prayer. Then he asks them to be hospitable, to welcome each other without grumbling, without complaint, making one another feel welcome, in other words, with genuine love.

Peter adds: "Above all, love one another deeply (NIV)." Peter highlights this part of his mandate as the most important and of utmost priority. Likewise, he introduces the concept that "love covers a multitude of sins." What the author of the epistle wants to communicate is that when true love is present in the life of the Christian as a consequence of his personal encounter with Jesus Christ, he will be willing to forgive no matter how intensely or often he has been offended, just as how his sins were forgiven.

According to Reeves (2012), there are two ways to cover sin, either by hiding it with pretexts or with God's forgiveness. The difference is that by hiding it, the sin remains, but when God forgives it, the sin ceases to exist. If we really love the sinner, we cannot let him follow the path to eternal hell, but we must help him obtain God's forgiveness, knowing that the end is near and that this is God's will.

5.2.6 We must use our gifts to serve others

The last idea that Peter (4:10-11) expresses in this passage is about the use of gifts. It should be noted that he doesn't speak of using gifts just to use them, but rather focuses his mandate on putting them at the service of others. Likewise, he asks that it be done with power and authority, without hesitation and not in a mediocre way.

As Hayford (1997) mentions, some people believe that they have the right to use their skills as they see fit. Others believe that they have no talents. Peter addresses both groups through these verses. We all receive from God an ability to do something in the ministry of the church, and it's part of our stewardship to discover this ability and use it to build up the church (Stanford, 2018).

When we use our gifts to help others as God wants, they will see Jesus Christ in us and praise him. This is another way of living according to the will of God. Doing so will allow you to give God glory and praise through Jesus Christ.

5.2.7 Practical Application

Peter's exhortation to live a life in accordance with God's will still holds true today for us as Christians. Sadly, we live in a society that has put God's will aside and put its own desires and pleasures first.

Although the term has been around since 1960, the word "yolo" (you only live once) has grown in popularity in recent years. According to the Oxford Dictionary (Oxford University Press, 2020), this word that literally means "you only live once" expresses the view that one should make the most of the present moment without worrying about the future, and is often used as a reason for impulsive or reckless behavior.

This is precisely how many are living today, not only the unconverted, but also Christians. With the excuse that we only live on this earth once, they justify sinful attitudes, forgetting Peter's exhortations. Living "yolo" as Christians is equivalent to:

- Belittling the suffering of Christ who gave us the example of a sinless life that was sacrificed for us.

- Courting sin, minimizing its severity and consequences.
- Playing down the judgment and accountability to come.
- Ignoring that the end is near.
- Living for our own pleasure without dedicating ourselves to the service of others.

That is, we would be rejecting the sacrifice of Christ if we lived according to our own will and going against everything that Peter warns us about.

If we want to live in holiness and please the Lord in our daily lives, we must:

- Put God's will before ours, always seeking his direction and guidance before making a decision, and enduring the suffering of losing "friends" by not behaving like them.
- Eradicate sin in our life, which can only be achieved with the help of the Holy Spirit who regenerates us and gives us a new nature without an inclination to sin. For this, it's essential to seek him from the heart and constantly practice the spiritual disciplines.
- Live in such a way that we are prepared to be accountable at any time. We must carry out a continuous self-evaluation of each one of our actions and analyze if we are carrying them out for our own benefit or for the glory of God. Christ is willing to forgive us.
- Show love in everything we do. First, love of God, and second, love of our neighbor, must be the driving force of every action we carry out. Service and kindness must be our distinctive characteristics.
- Exercise our gifts for the glory of God and the service of others. Whatever our calling, gift or talent, it's important that we develop and practice it, always keeping in mind that it should glorify God and be edifying to others.

5.3 Conclusion

The key phrase in this passage is "enough is enough" (NIV). This expression denotes sufficiency, urgency and to some extent, contentment. It's the duty of a Christian not only to refrain from excesses, but also from those things that can lead to sin or that have the appearance of evil. Peter urges his readers to cut off all connection to the life of sin so that they can focus on fulfilling God's will.

It's time for Christians to give "yolo" a new meaning. Instead of using it to justify an attitude of debauchery, let us use it to lead a life of holiness. Well, if we only live once, and our eternal sentence depends on what we do in this life, why shouldn't we use it to live according to God's will?

Proposed activities:

1. Take a self-test and write for yourself in which areas of life you are still struggling. List those things that hinder you and that are sin that you need to leave behind.
2. What can be your action plan to live a transformed life in Christ?
3. Determine today to have a spiritual friend to whom you are accountable for doing what Christ wants. Write down who it can be and talk to that person.

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Lesson 6. **Characteristics of a Christian Leader**

Biblical Text: 1 Tim. 3:1

"Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task."

Purpose:

- **Describe** the characteristics of a leader according to Paul's pastoral letters.
- **Apply** a self-assessment to determine your strengths and needs as a Christian leader.
- **Prepare** a personal work plan to improve in your areas of opportunity.

6.1 Introduction

Many people tend to fall into a comfort zone in their daily work, sometimes including ministry. However, Christ's call to us is to have a life governed by the highest standards. That's why it's very important to know these standards, and more so when we exercise a leadership role within the church.

The letters that the apostle Paul wrote to his friends Titus and Timothy are invaluable writings when considering the characteristics that should distinguish the servants of God. It's important that as Christians we conduct a personal self-assessment in light of these qualities in order to identify our areas of opportunity and establish an action plan for improvement.

Development

6.2.1 Qualities of the servant of God

The qualities of a servant of God described by Paul in the 1st and 2nd epistles of Timothy and Titus (United Bible Societies, 2002) are listed below:

1 Timothy

- Cannot be accused of anything wrong. (3:2), (Titus 1:6,8)
- Has only one partner. (3:2), (Titus 1:6)
- Controls all his desires, and thinks twice about what he is going to do. (3:2), (Titus 1:9, 2:2)
- Behaves properly. (3:2)
- Welcomes visitors into his home. (3:2), (Titus 1:8)
- Knows how to teach. (3:2)
- Isn't drunk or violent, or picks fight. (3:3, 3:8), (2 Timothy 2:24), (Titus 1:7, 2:3)
- Friendly and calm. (3:3)
- Not worried about money. (3:3)
- Governs his family well and educates his children in love. (3:4), (Titus 1:6)
- Has the respect of people who don't believe in Jesus Christ. (3:4)
- Respectable. (3:8)
- Truthful. (3:8)

- Doesn't cheat in business. (3:8), (Titus 1:7)
- Always believes in the good news that God has given us. (3:9)
- Has a clear conscience. (3:9)
- Isn't gossipy, but rather serious and faithful in everything. (3:12), (Titus 2:3)
- Teaches the truth. (4:6)
- Studies and obeys Christian teachings. (4:6)
- Is an example to other Christians. (4:12)
- Pure. (4:12)
- Has a loving character, trusts in God. (4:12)
- Uses his God-given special abilities. (4:13)
- Treats everyone with respect. (5:1-2)
- Helps those who need help. (5:3), (Titus 3:15)
- Is fair to everyone, without having favorites. (5:21), (Titus 1:8)
- Turns away from evil. (5:22), (Titus 1:8, 2:12)
- Obeys his masters. (6:1), (Titus 2:10)
- Does their job well, and even better. (6:2)
- Stays away from everything bad. (6:11)
- Is patient and kind to others. (6:11), (Titus 2:10)
- Isn't proud or trusts his wealth. (6:17)
- Gives and shares what he has. (6:18)

2nd Timothy

- Isn't ashamed to speak well of Jesus. (1:8)
- Is willing to suffer to announce the good news. (1:8)
- Doesn't stop trusting God (1:13), (Titus 2:2)
- Doesn't allow anyone to contradict good teaching. (1:14), (Titus 1:9)
- Is willing to suffer for Christ. (2:3)
- Has nothing to be ashamed of. (2:15)
- Correctly teaches the true message. (2:15), (Titus 1:9, 2:1)
- Avoids godless chatter. (2:16,23), (Titus 2:10)
- Isn't carried away by temptations. (2:22)
- Is good to everyone, knows how to teach. (2:24), (Titus 1:7, 2:8)
- Is very patient. (2:24), (Titus 2:2)
- Corrects with humility. (2:25)

- Keeps calm, endures suffering. (4:5), (Titus 1:7, 3:9)
- Does his job well. (4:5)

Titus

- Isn't a tyrant. (1:7)
- Is holy and disciplined in everything. (1:8)
- Convinces those who oppose good teaching. (1:9)
- Is responsible, control his wishes. (2:2)
- Loves others. (2:2)
- Takes good care of his family. (2:5)
- Soundness of speech. (2:8)
- Is honest and faithful to God. (2:12)
- Doesn't give a reason to be disrespected. (2:15)
- Obeys the rulers and authorities of the country. (3:1)

6.2.2 An Evaluation

If God has called us to be leaders within the church, it's important to take into account each of the characteristics described above. For this, the proposal is that each of us make an evaluation in two aspects:

- 1) A self-assessment. For this we must pray that God helps us make such an evaluation as honestly as possible. In Jeremiah 17:9, God warns us that our hearts are deceitful. So, we must ask that we not deceive ourselves in making our assessment.
- 2) An evaluation carried out by other people who know us. It's recommended here that if family members are involved, they are strongly asked to do so with complete honesty.

Once we have the results of both evaluations, we must contrast them. There may be some discrepancies that can be explained because:

- We give an appearance of what we are not.
- They don't know us well.
- They were afraid to be honest in their answers.

6.2.3 Prepare a personal Development Plan

After analyzing the results of the double evaluation, develop a plan and a commitment to God to improve in those areas of opportunity that you have identified. Next, I will give an example of how to do it. Suppose the results showed that I need to improve in the following aspects:

- Learn to have self-control, to be able to control my emotions and handle stressful situations in the best possible way.

Since joy, peace, patience, and self-control are part of the fruit of the Spirit, it's important that the plan of action includes the constant practice of the spiritual disciplines. To this end, I propose to carry out the following improvement activities.

Actions to develop:

Activity 1: Time alone with God

- Place and time: Daily and consistently, at least 20 minutes before starting the day's work.
- Justification: The time alone with God will allow me to make sure that I am connected with the Holy Spirit and give my day to him before starting my work, thus putting it in his hands and remembering that only He is in control.

Activity 2: Personal Devotional

- Place and time: Daily and constantly, before going to sleep.
- Justification: This quiet time with God will allow me to surrender my burdens, my feelings, and my concerns at the end of the day, and it will help me find rest in His presence and His Word.

Activity 3: Make a to-do list and choose priorities

- Place and time: Review weekly.
- Justification: By making a to-do list, I can measure my workload and know if I need help with something or how I should organize my time to perform each task at the right time. Assigning priorities will help me work on what is important and not simply on what is urgent.

Activity 4: Take a course on conflict resolution and stress management

- Place and time: In the next three months.
- Justification: Sometimes my anger comes from accumulated offenses due to feelings or conflicts that I didn't know how to handle properly. This course will help me find a way to solve problems as they happen and not wait until they pile up.

Activity 5: Take a "time out"

- Place and time: In times of high stress.
- Rationale: Taking a "time out" will allow me to pause to analyze the situation before acting, responding, or making a decision, putting it in God's hands before my emotions erupt.

6.3 Conclusions

Notice that having studied the characteristics of a person who aspires to be or is already a servant of God, most of these characteristics have to do with the character of the person. In other words, Paul says that we must first be transformed by Jesus in order to later be used as his instruments in the building up of the church.

The virtues that Paul details in his letters to Titus and Timothy should be representative characteristics of all of God's servants. Our desire should be to reflect Christ as did Paul, Timothy, Titus, and many other worthy servants who have raised the standard of the Christian life.

Personally, we must make an evaluation by ourselves and consider the opinions of those who know us. This will help us know our areas where we need improvement. For this case, an example was illustrated with results of: patience, joy, and self-control to keep calm, not getting angry easily and learning to control my emotions.

From there, we detail an action plan that will lead us to improve these characteristics. The example showed some of the activities to be carried out: With the help of the Holy Spirit, we should work to be consistent in our time alone with God, be consistent in our daily devotionals, make a to-do list and assign priorities, and learn to solve conflicts as they happen and not internalize them.

Proposed activities:

1. Conduct a self-evaluation considering the list given in 1 Timothy. Write down your strengths.
2. Conduct a self-evaluation considering the list given in 1 Timothy. Write down your weaknesses.
3. Describe at least three activities that you can do to improve in your areas of opportunity.

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Lesson 7. **The Spiritual Life as a Disciple of Christ**

Biblical Text: Galatians 5:17

For the flesh desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the flesh. They are in conflict with each other, so that you are not to do whatever you want.

Objectives:

- **Understand** that new life in Christ is lived in the spirit.
- **Analyze** the spiritual life of some of the disciples in the time of Jesus.
- **Commit** to practicing spiritual exercises that strengthen your life.

7.1 Introduction

Our Lord Jesus always took time to have a deep relationship with the Father who had sent him. That was what allowed him on every occasion to emerge victorious before the enemy, who at all times sought to prevent his saving Work. We can see Jesus going off to pray and fast for 40 days before beginning his ministry. We see him quoting the Word, which is indicative that he studied it.

However, there are people who, when they convert to Christianity, believe that it's possible to live a victorious life by only using their own means. Before long, failure comes, then frustration in trying over and over again, until finally many of them give up on following Christ.

For this reason, we're going to study how some of Jesus' disciples sought to cultivate a spiritual life, always seeking to follow the model that Jesus left us. Knowing this will allow us to continue in this maturation process, giving it due attention as we seek to be transformed by His Holy Spirit through a deep personal relationship with Christ.

7.2 Development

7.2.1 Spiritual Life of Mary and Martha

Mary, Martha and Lazarus were siblings to each other, and friends and followers of Jesus. They welcomed Jesus into their home on more than one occasion. Although very different, the attitudes shown by Martha and Mary toward Jesus gives us some great lessons.

- On one occasion when Jesus was visiting her home, Martha was in a hurry serving and doing everything possible to serve Jesus in the best way. Although this attitude is frequently criticized, we can learn from Martha about her spirit of service. She knew that although he was her friend, her guest wasn't just anybody, and she wanted to make sure she was serving Jesus as well as possible (Luke 10: 38-42).
- But on the other hand, Mary chose to sit at the feet of Jesus, listening to him as he spoke. Martha expressed her frustration by asking Jesus to tell her sister to help her. To her surprise, Jesus replied that Mary had chosen the best part. Mary's highest priority was to be close to Jesus and learn from him and imitate him. Mary was clear about her priorities, and although there were other tasks to be done, she didn't allow anything to distract her attention from the Master. Her heart showed reverence and adoration.

- When their brother became ill, the sisters sent a message to Jesus, who was preaching two days away. Their message was that Lazarus was sick and they urgently requested his presence (John 11: 1-3). They knew that Jesus was very fond of Lazarus and they were sure that he would do anything to help him. Mary and Martha were convinced of Jesus' power and turned to him for their brother to receive healing, because they knew that he performed miracles and loved them.
- Days later, after Lazarus had died, Jesus went to comfort the sisters. Here Martha and Mary separately made very big statements of faith and affirmed to Jesus that if he had been there, their brother wouldn't have died. In addition, Martha expressed with full faith, "but I know that even now God will give you everything you ask" (John 11:21-22). Martha's faith in her friend wasn't small; she knew Jesus very well and knew what he was capable of. This filled her with peace, even in the midst of her brother's death.
- One occasion when Jesus was visiting them, it's narrated how Mary took a bottle with almost half a liter of an expensive perfume prepared with the essence of tuberose and anointed Jesus' feet and dried them with her hair (John 12:1-11). Mary didn't care about the monetary value of that perfume. All she wanted was to worship and revere him.

7.2.2 Spiritual Life of Barnabas

In the book of Acts, we find a Levite from Cyprus named Joseph (Acts 4:36), whom the apostles called Barnabas, which means "son of consolation" or "son of exhortation."

- Barnabas was part of the early church in which everything that people had was shared with each other, and no one felt like they owned anything. Barnabas sold some of his land, and all of the money from the sale was given to the apostles for the edification of the gospel (Acts 4:37).
- On another occasion (Acts 11:28-29), we read that they collected an offering and brought it to those who had nothing to eat. With this act, we can see his inclination to serve others. Barnabas wasn't selfish, but had a compassionate heart. In the same way, he had a correct perspective on money and property, recognizing that everything belongs to God.
- Later, the brothers and sisters of the Jerusalem church learned that in Antioch there were many hearing the gospel and converting, so they sent Barnabas there (Acts 11:22). This attitude reflects service and submission before God, as well as his willingness to go wherever God sent him.
- Acts 11:23 tells us that Barnabas was a good man who had the power of the Holy Spirit and trusted only in the Lord.
- When Barnabas arrived at Antioch and saw that God had blessed all those people, he was very happy and encouraged them to continue being faithful and obedient to the Lord (Acts 11:24). Barnabas was interested in the spiritual formation of new believers, and reflected the fruit of the Holy Spirit through joy and encouragement.
- Through his ministry, a great multitude was added to the Lord (Acts 11:24). Barnabas allowed himself to be used by the Holy Spirit and had a willing heart.

- Barnabas and Paul were in Antioch for a year, preaching and teaching in the church (Acts 11:26). He wasn't idle; he was active in service for the edification of others. Barnabas was willing and available. We can see that he put into practice his gifts and talents that the Holy Spirit had given him.
- Barnabas was Paul's companion on his first missionary journey (Acts 13:1-3). Later, Barnabas was also part of other missionary trips. This shows us once again his willingness, his love for the gospel, his life of sacrifice, and his passion to reach the lost.

7.2.3 Spiritual Life of Peter

Simon Peter, also known as Cephas (John 1:42), was one of the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ, and one of his closest friends. Simon was a fisherman by trade on the Sea of Galilee when Jesus chose him to become a fisher of men.

- The first close encounter between Jesus and Peter is recounted in Luke 5: 1-11. After working long hours, Jesus tells Peter to cast his nets again and a miraculous catch occurs. Peter immediately fell to his knees before Jesus in amazement, recognizing the greatness of the Master. This act of Peter shows us self-humiliation and exaltation to Christ.
- In the same scene, Jesus tells Peter not to fear, and shares his plan to make him a fisher of men. The Bible says that Peter left everything he had and immediately followed Jesus (Luke 5:11). Peter obeyed immediately; without hesitation he was willing to give up everything to go with Jesus. He didn't leave it for later, nor did he have to consult with anyone. For the next three years, Peter lived as a disciple of the Lord Jesus.
- Peter witnessed the miracles by Jesus, and he himself performed miracles, always in the name of Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 3:6-8, 5:15-16, 9:34). This shows us his faith in action. Peter had full confidence in Jesus' miraculous power.
- More importantly, it was Peter who first confessed Jesus as "the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matthew 16:16-17), a truth that Jesus said had been revealed to Peter by God Himself. Peter not only saw Jesus with his physical eyes, but his spiritual eyes were opened to him by God and the truth was revealed to him.
- Another important fact is that when Jesus revealed to his disciples that he had to suffer and that he would be executed, Peter, probably saddened by what he heard, asked him not to say those words. Jesus immediately rebuked him and explained that it was necessary to fulfill His Father's will. Peter didn't hold a grudge in his heart, nor was he offended. Rather, Peter accepted his Lord's correction since he knew it was for his own good.
- Peter demonstrated a tremendous change of character, from being impulsive, doubting Jesus, and denying Him three times, to being raised by God to be a pillar of the Church. Peter was the first to recognize the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2). On the day of Pentecost, he rose from the crowd and began to preach the gospel.
- Peter was called to the home of the Roman centurion Cornelius. At first, he had resisted since Cornelius was a Gentile, but eventually he obeyed and Cornelius also believed and received the Holy Spirit. Peter concluded that "God is no respecter of persons" (Acts 10:34).

7.3 Conclusions

We have studied some of the ways that Jesus' disciples sought to develop their spiritual life. This is only possible by accepting Jesus as Savior and asking him to fill us with his Holy Spirit. From there we should seek to strengthen our spiritual life through actions such as those studied in this lesson: praying, fasting, studying the Word, spending time in worship to God, serving out of love for others, worshiping God through our gifts and possessions, among others.

We ask God to give us the hands of Martha to serve him, and the heart of Mary to always give him priority above all else and worship him. May we have faith even when circumstances are adverse. "I have believed that you are the Christ, the Son of God, the One who comes into the world."

Let us ask God to help us be like Barnabas, who was always exhorting and encouraging others to remain faithful. In the same way, God please help us have your spirit of compassion and sow generously in your work. We want your Holy Spirit to say: "Set apart this disciple for me for the work to which I have called him."

Father, what better example of spirit formation than Peter! You transformed his life and radically changed it while you were together. Transform my life, I pray. I declare that "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."

Proposed activities:

1. Describe the spiritual exercises that will strengthen your life.
2. In which of them do you feel that you should improve? Explain why.
3. Write your commitment to God of a plan to strengthen your spiritual life.

Lesson 8. **Do Not Be Influenced By the World**

Biblical Text: Acts 5:29

Peter and the other apostles replied: We must obey God rather than human beings!

Objectives:

- **Explain** what the Bible says about following the crowd.
- **Value** the example of Jesus and the apostles who went against the crowd, even suffering violent deaths for it.
- **Renew** the commitment to follow Jesus by listening to His voice.
- **Watch** continuously so as not to give in to the pressure of the enemy to do wrong.

8.1 Introduction

Have you ever experienced the pressure of a group that wants you to behave like them? Unfortunately in the vast majority of cases, many end up giving in to pressure and adopt the same behavior as the majority, despite being convinced that it's not the right thing to do. The examples are endless; today it's accepted by many to have sex before marriage, consume alcoholic beverages, smoke, etc.

In relation to this, there's a psychology study that was given the name "Solomon Syndrome." In this study, experiments were designed to demonstrate the power of conformity in groups. The study observed the behavior of people and the decisions they made or the behaviors they acted on to avoid drawing attention to themselves or to keep themselves from standing out in a crowd.



This can occur at different levels and in different contexts; with students and classmates; within a family; in the work place; even at a societal level within a community.

Have you been pressured by a group to adopt certain behaviors? How can we help others not to give in to such pressure when they are influenced to do something bad/wrong? What obstacles have you faced in wanting to be salt and light? How can we overcome those obstacles?

8.2 Development

8.2.1 Christianity as a Counterculture

Jesus, being a Jew, stood up to the Jewish culture of his day. He sought to establish God's divine authority, rather than abiding by all of the requirements of Jewish national life. "And the Jews rejected him in the name of culture. When passing from a Jewish environment to a Gentile one, the problem of the relationship of the new religion with the new culture appeared."

The problem of the relationship between Christ and culture immediately concerns the fundamental issues of Christian thought and action. From his earthly ministry, we see Christ transforming the culture. I believe that He has placed us where we are to be the salt and light of the society in which we must minister. Nevertheless, knowing the culture will allow us to be more effective in fulfilling the great commission.

Like in the time of Jesus, one is obliged to analyze the beliefs that prevail in their environment and not conform to them automatically, but after making an analysis of them through the light that the Bible shines, adopt them or speak out against them.

Taking Jesus' example, we must avoid taking positions of isolation, exclusivity, or falling into the extreme of rejecting established institutions. Rather, we should approach these things with a positive and hopeful attitude, knowing that God continues to have the same transformative power that Christ used during his earthly ministry.

On the other hand, as a church, we have the obligation to denounce those actions, laws, etc. that go against the statutes of God, such as marriage between people of the same gender, abortion, etc.

8.2.2 Do We Blend in with the World?

We've been sent to be salt and light. Therefore, we must be careful not to conform to the thinking of the world, but rather to be a means for Christ to transform it. As disciples of Jesus, we cannot let the world rule our behavior.

However, as the psychologist Solomon Asch has shown since the 1950s, when faced with a simple question, the vast majority of people prefer to give the wrong answer even knowing that it's wrong if they feel like they are a part of or accepted by a group of peers. This pathology is known as the herd mentality. His conclusion was that this attitude reflects "a general lack of self-esteem, and that our society tends to condemn the talent and success of others."

Faced with this, we must ask ourselves if the enemy has put in us what the Bible calls a "mental fortress," which is leading us to adapt to society instead of being used as instruments of blessing so that others can come to know Jesus. We must always be alert because the enemy will always try to influence us in a subtle way so that we start by not denouncing something as a sin; then we begin to see it as a "normality," and finally we adopt behaviors that offend God because they are a sin.

8.2.3 How to Identify a Person Suffering from Solomon Syndrome

Vanessa Fernández (2016) describes how we can identify a person affected by Solomon syndrome. These traits include:

- They seek to go unnoticed.
- They have a fear of saying what they think. If they speak up, it's because it's in agreement with the average person in their group.
- They try not to stand out or be different from a certain group. This is seen in the way they dress; they try to dress the same, trying not to be contrary, showing the same preferences, etc.
- They stop making decisions and expect others to make them for them.
- They end up doing what the group wants to do, even if it doesn't coincide with their beliefs.
- They come to the point of doubting their own beliefs or decisions and see others as more successful than themselves.



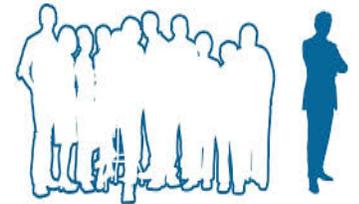
The Solomon syndrome can occur in people who:

a) Have a high level of frustration and little sense of control, having low self-esteem.

- Possibly they have suffered harassment and different stressful and traumatic events which have led them to doubt their own abilities.
- People with superior abilities are disinterested in them.

b) They have an exaggerated self-esteem

- Usually borderline narcissistic
- They can't stand that others achieve great successes, for they fear being displaced or that they will have to share the spotlight with someone else. Sadly, we could be exercising this attitude even as Christians, either consciously or unconsciously. This goes against what God tells us when he said, "be strong and courageous" (Joshua 1:6-9).



8.2.4 What causes Solomon syndrome?

- Having a low self-esteem.
- Lack of self-confidence.
- Need to be accepted by peers (group or "herd"). This is strongest during the teenage years.
- Emotional dependence.
- Difficulty making decisions.

8.2.5 What can we do about this problem?

If others attack us for being different:

- We must decide which group/herd we want to belong to. In Acts 5:29, we are taught that we must first obey God rather than men.
- Don't lose our Christian identity.
- Have self-respect in our beliefs, despite looking bad in front of others. In Ex. 23:2a, we're told "Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong."
- We must develop skills of assertiveness. This means, among other things, knowing how to say no to something that we don't agree with.
- We must make decisions based on Christian values.
- Maintain a conciliatory attitude when not violating biblical principles. This will allow us to build a bridge and come closer to have the opportunity to share the gospel with them.
- Improve our self-esteem through a deeper relationship with Christ.
- Express our opinions in "a firm way" and show determination in what we do or don't do.

8.3 Conclusion

We have seen that Christianity has gone against the culture of this world since its inception. Jesus himself was rejected by his people, the Jews. However, He didn't give in at any time to anything that had to do with what our heavenly Father wants of us.

We have been commissioned to be salt and light. That must be reflected in all areas of our lives and in the various roles that we carry out. Therefore, let us learn to be agents of change in the midst of a society that, ruled by the enemy of our souls, will try to lead us in the opposite direction of the principles established by God.

Proposed activities:

1. Have you ever felt rejected by a group, be it at school or work or even in your own family? What was your experience like?
2. Explain what the Bible says about following crowds, even when they're wrong.
3. Decide who you are going to serve. Pray that you will make a decision like Joshua's (Joshua 24:15) when he said, "But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord." Renew your personal commitment to follow Jesus by listening to His voice that calls you.

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Lesson 9. **Beware of Envy**

Biblical Text: Galatians 5:26

Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Objectives:

- **Explain** some reasons why people tend to reject others.
- **Reflect** on the possibility that we are rejecting people for being different from us.
- **Reflect** on how envy can lead us to commit terrible sins.

9.1 Introduction

Have you noticed that many people are envious of those around them because they excel in one area or another? Or have you yourself felt uncomfortable when seeing that people you know begin to stand out?

There are various studies on the tendency that some people, groups, or even societies have in which they reject those with characteristics that stand out more than their own. This, as has been observed, is due to the fear of being surpassed or questioned by them. As a result, the group tends to try to maintain a constant uniformity in which distinctions are frowned upon and / or punished.



By studying the Gospels, we can see how Jesus was rejected by the religious leaders and rulers of his time, and even by his own family who didn't fully understand him. However, in no way did that make him give up the mission that the Father had entrusted to him.

Have you experienced something similar? Have you noticed that people with special abilities, gifts or talents are often rejected out of envy? Have you envied others for being capable of doing something you can't or for having something that you don't have?

9.2 Development

9.2.1 The Pathology of Envy

In Genesis 4, the Bible shows us a family tragedy. Cain killed his brother Abel because God was pleased with Abel's offering, but wasn't pleased with Cain's. The Bible warns us to be very careful not to be jealous and envious of something we don't possess. In more contemporary times, studies have been expanded in this regard. In fact, there's a pathology that is called Procrustes in reference to an innkeeper in Greek mythology. It's said that Procrustes offered refuge to travelers. He would offer them a bed of a certain size. Then at night when they slept, he would tie them up and see if they fit the bed. If their body was too long, he would saw off the excess body parts, if they were too short, he would hammer out their joints until they stretched to fit the bed.

Finally, Procrustes got a taste of his own medicine. Mythology tells that he was killed by the hero Theseus in the same manner that he had killed others. Hence, the saying of the "Procrustean bed: If you stand out, I will cut off your feet. If you prove to be bigger than me, I will cut off your head...". Is there still some Procrustes in our lives? How can we identify it? How can we be healed of that envy and jealousy of others? We'll see how in the following sections.

9.2.2 How does envy manifests itself?

People who suffer from this pathology are identified because:

- They try to boycott outstanding people.
- They want others to stay in a place where they can't apply their imagination and abilities.
- They try to hurt the more skilled by humiliating and harassing them.

"The people with Procrustean syndrome ... are dream quenchers, hope severers, psychological manipulators and masters of covert aggression"

Valeria Sabater

9.2.3 What kind of people display envy?

Procrustean syndrome occurs in two types of people:

a) People with low self-esteem.

- They have a high level of frustration and little sense of control.
- They have possibly suffered harassment and different stressful and traumatic events, which have led them to doubt their own abilities.
- People with superior abilities want to stay away from them.
- They're very emotionally sensitive to the achievement of others, feeling overshadowed.
- They don't tolerate criticism of their abilities.
- They fear that those who are outstanding bring innovations and change to the company, but they aren't willing to change.

b) People with exaggerated self-esteems:

- The fear of being outdone makes them unable to recognize the ideas of others as valid, and they direct their efforts to hindering the initiatives of others.
- They don't support the idea that others can also achieve great successes because they fear being displaced or that they may have to share the spotlight.
- They take over all the tasks and don't give others the opportunity to stand out.
- They believe that their ideas are always the best; they border on almost narcissistic limits.

Sadly, we can exercise this attitude consciously or unconsciously. These types of people won't hesitate to manipulate others to attack the person who is outstanding.

9.2.4 Various areas in which this is observed and the consequences.

Work Environment

- They promote a tense work environment.
- They always impose their ideas, even if they aren't the best ideas. The administrators and satraps looked for grounds to place charges against Daniel because of his exceptional qualities (Daniel 6:3-5).
- They do things to prevent others from progressing (they don't allow others to participate in a project, they block others from receiving promotions, etc.).
- They avoid assigning tasks to those who may/will stand out.
- They demand levels of work that they themselves cannot achieve.



"And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person's envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind." Ecclesiastes 4:4

Family Environment

- They won't tolerate a sibling standing out more than they do. "Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other." Galatians 5:26
- They may go as far as physical violence because of their envy of their sibling. Remember the case of Joseph whose brothers plotted to kill him and eventually ended up selling him into slavery (Gen. 37).
- They want their parents to give them the best. Remember the prodigal son and his brother (Luke 15:11-32).
- They'll try to deprive their siblings of the good that belongs to them. Remember Jacob and Esau with the birthright and their father's blessing (Genesis 25:27-34; 27).
- The rebellious Korah and his followers envied Moses' position as leader, making false accusations against him (Numbers 16:13).
- David's brothers were envious of him. When he took food to them on the battle front, they didn't hesitate to make him feel bad (1 Samuel 17:17-28).

Envy is a thousand times more terrible than hunger, because it's spiritual hunger
Miguel de Unamuno

Christian Environment

- They long for the "more visible" ministries (Matt. 20:20-28). "She said, 'Grant that one of these two sons of mine may sit at your right and the other at your left in your kingdom.'"
- They might unleash persecution that ends up damaging their own spiritual life. The case of Saul chasing David is a clear example of this. (1 Samuel 18:7-9)
- They create tension and stress by wanting to impose their vision and interests. We can imagine the scene where the Jews incited the crowd to turn against Paul. (Acts 13:44,45)
- The chief priests and the teachers of the law sought ways to kill Jesus because they were afraid of him because the people were amazed at his teaching. (Mark 11:18)
- They'll seek to magnify the mistakes of others.
- They'll say that it's impossible to carry out the ideas that others propose.

9.2.5 What should we do?

9.2.5.1 If you are experiencing envy.

- Envy and pride are the fruit of our sinful nature, and the devil likes to take advantage of that. We must fight against them with the Word and prayer (James 4:5-7).
- If we remain angry or upset, God warns us that we will end up doing something wrong (Genesis 4:6). "Why are you angry?" the Lord asked Cain ...
- There will always be the danger of falling, but we are exhorted to overcome sin (Genesis 4:7). You will be accepted if you do the right thing, but if you refuse to do the right thing, then be careful! Sin is at the door, lurking and eager to control you; but you must overcome it and be its master. That's why Jesus exhorts us saying: " First go and be reconciled to them (your brother or sister); then come and offer your gift." Matthew 5:24
- If we don't do something fast, our emotions can control us, and that can be very bad. Cain ended up killing his brother Abel.
- If evil conquers us, we will be punished. God sent Cain far away from his family and from God's presence. In Genesis 4, "Cain said to the Lord, 'My punishment is more than I can bear.'"
- Learn to accept yourself; recognize that God lovingly created each one of us.
- Since that is the case, prepare yourself to do your best in everything you do. That includes your secular work. Colossians 3:23-24

9.2.5.2 If you are the victim of someone else's envy.

- Show empathy towards them. In doing so, you show them that there's a need in their heart that can only be filled by Christ.
- Think of them as people for whom Jesus died.
- Be willing to give sound advice- when allowed.
- Help them discover what led them to be in this situation.

9.3 Conclusion

Today there are many people who are envious of others. It can occur in any area of our lives, including within the family. It may be for the material things others have acquired, for professional achievements others have made, for the job someone else has, etc. Envy can also be for certain achievements that others have obtained, such as their degree of influence, success at work, growth of their church/class, etc. Envy denotes a serious problem in that person's heart.

We must first check to make sure that this is not the case with us. If it is, we must ask God to help us get rid of it and live a contented life. We must remember that since envy is a sin, it can cause spiritual death. If we have to associate with a person like this, it's our responsibility to think of that person as Jesus would. Don't reject them but try to teach them about Christ who can heal them. It'll be their decision whether to accept Christ and His healing or not.

We must also think about what kind of family we're shaping. Let's help our children from an early age accept themselves as they are and accept others' differences. Let's teach them that God has a design and a plan for each person, and that in the eyes of Jesus, no one has more value because they have money, fame, or power. Let's not pressure our children to be ultra competitive, always in search of "success." Each of us have been called for a purpose, and God has provided us with various abilities to achieve that purpose. Let's teach them to work together more than competitively.

If you are proactive, creative and capable of surpassing others in more than one aspect, don't stop applying your skills and talents to your work, home, church, etc. Your abilities are a gift from God, and He expects you to use those talents and abilities in the different environments in which you live, as a parent, employee, Christian, etc. Don't let "dream killers" ruin God's plan for you. And remember to always give Christ all the honor for what you accomplish.

Proposed activities:

1. Are you experiencing envy in any of your different environments? Identify how you have experienced it.
2. If you or another person experience envy, what should one do to rid themselves of it?
3. Analyze how we should act if we're rejected.

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Lesson 10. **Avoid being overprotective in order to develop strong disciples**

Biblical Text: Luke 2:52

And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man.

Objectives:

- **Value** the importance of creating healthy and independent children.
- **Explain** and adopt measures to avoid molding fragile children.
- **Be aware** that the way we educate our children today will affect them throughout their lives, for better or for worse.

10.1 Introduction

We live in a contradictory situation. On the one hand, we see a generation of young people with great academic and intellectual preparation. But at the same time, we see how many of them are going through states of depression and anxiety (Martins, 2019).



Some have called this the "crystal generation" because they appear to be more fragile and "break" more easily than members of previous generations. This is largely because we haven't been successful in helping their emotional development. This causes them to have a very hard time whenever they suffer a setback in their life.

Have you ever wondered, am I overprotecting my children? What are the consequences of overprotection? Is there anything I can do for my children, whom I overprotected, now that they are grown up and have started their own family? If you were overprotected, maybe you've experienced the feeling that you can't take it anymore when it seems that the storms are gathering around you and you think, "How can I get out of this?" How do I overcome the frailty with which I was shaped?

10.2 Development

10.2.1 The caterpillar and the butterfly

When we have the opportunity to observe how things unfold in nature, we're often amazed at how wonderfully God designed it. One of the things that continues to amaze me is the transformation of the caterpillar, which is often not very pretty, into a butterfly, that as children we chase after because they captivate us with their beautiful colors and the fact that they can fly. Even now I still enjoy watching butterflies. But I ask you to stop and reflect on this extraordinary transformation process, called metamorphosis. A story told by Jorge Bucay explains something that should teach us a great lesson. In the story, J. Bucay talks about how his mother, as a child, observed a caterpillar cocoon trying to break out of its shell so it could spread its wings. There came a point when the caterpillar stopped fighting for a moment. The mother mistakenly thought that the caterpillar no longer had the necessary strength to complete its mission and was going to die, but later she would see that she had misperceived the situation.

In the narration it tells us that, believing to help the caterpillar, the mother took a pair of scissors and cut open the cocoon that surrounded it so that the butterfly could emerge. After a short time, the butterfly was able to come out. It seemed that her idea was brilliant, and her act had been generous.

But let's see what happened next. The body of the butterfly was whitish, small, and its wings were crushed. Worried, the woman continued to watch the butterfly, thinking that at any moment the it would open its wings, stretch them and fly away, but that didn't happen. The butterfly never flew, and during the few hours it survived, it only crawled pitifully. So, with its weak body and its wings gathered, it was only a short time until it died.



Jorge Bucay narrates it like this:

"Butterflies need that terrible effort that means breaking their prison to be able to live, because during those moments, explained my grandfather, the heart beats with great force and the pressure that is generated in its primitive circulatory system injects blood into the wings, thus expanding them and enabling it to fly. The butterfly that was helped out of its cocoon could never spread its wings because my mother had not let it fight for its life." (Torres, 2015)

By "helping" it to take a short cut, with the intention of avoiding suffering, the development process was interrupted, which contributed to its lack of ability to complete the natural cycle. Thus, its life ended in a short amount of time in a pitiful way.

What lesson does this teach us about caring for our children? How would you explain it? What should we do and what shouldn't we do to help them develop their abilities so that they grow up healthy and achieve the full potential that God has put in them?



Jorge Bucay masterfully mentions:

"My grandfather, who seems to have been one of those almost illiterate scholars who roam the world, stroked his head and told me that there was nothing else she should have done, that in reality the best way to help would have been to do less and not more ..."

10.2.2 How can you overprotect?

As parents, we overprotect when:

- we speak for our children, without giving them the opportunity to speak for themselves;
- we solve all their problems, without giving them the opportunity to learn from them;
- we don't establish limits or norms of behavior, and don't require consequences for wrong behavior;
- we try to give them everything they ask for that's within our reach.

In the long run, none of these actions will benefit our children.

10.2.3 Dangers of overprotection

In the 70's, Roberto Carlos performed a song called "Traumas". An excerpt from the song reads as follows:

<i>"My father one day told me</i>	<i>The realities of a world</i>
<i>That he would never lie</i>	<i>That one day I would know</i>
<i>But he also forgot</i>	<i>The traumas that people feel</i>
<i>To tell me the truth</i>	<i>After growing up" ...</i>

In this popular song, we can see mistakes that parents make when trying to overprotect their little ones. We take away the opportunity for them to naturally development their abilities that will serve them throughout their lives.

Navarro (2020) identifies the following dangers faced by people who have grown up in an overprotected environment:

- Less able to control their emotions.
- Inability to develop their skills.
- They grow up being very insecure.
- Inability to learn from their mistakes.
- Get frustrated easily.
- Become fearful.
- They often feel unsatisfied.
- Tend to have learning problems.
- They show aggressiveness towards people around them.
- An unhealthy dependency between parents and children is created.
- They shy away from problems instead of facing them.



10.2.4 How to avoid overprotectiveness?

- Encourage play with other children, without much interference.
- Help children manage their problems.
- Teach them to make decisions.
- Make them face consequences when they do something wrong.
- Guide them without doing it for them.
- Give them partial help in which they can collaborate.
- Help them in the process of being independent as they grow to avoid making them dependent.
- Look for occasions to ask them for their help or ideas.



- Ask them how they think they can solve a situation instead of giving them the immediate answer.
- Analyze mistakes with them.
- Don't do things for them, but do things with them (Torres, 2015).

10.3 Conclusion

The chrysalis is a phase in which we can't see what's happening, after the larval stage and before the adult stage. The chrysalis phase is when the body and wings of the butterfly develop as its hidden from the world. In an analogy, that's what happens to our children when we have them at home. They must develop their abilities, which is taking place through a process that perhaps many can't observe, so that when they leave the house, they're ready to live independently and perhaps start their own family. For those of us in the home, God has given us the direction and the privilege of witnessing that growth and development.

Our children's development process is as wonderful as the transformation of the caterpillar into a butterfly. As parents, we must support this process as it occurs naturally. Our children must learn, sometimes through making mistakes and by holding them responsible in facing consequences for their decisions.

If we allow this process to take place, every difficulty, every decision made, every resolved conflict will help them become stronger. At some point, with absolute certainty, they will no longer be the same, there will be in them a rebirth, and what they were will have been left behind.

Without a doubt, the greatest transformation any of our children will ever experience will come from accepting Christ into their life. In Romans 12:2, we're told that everyone must undergo a transformation, a metamorphosis. And the one who will help us through this experience will be the Holy Spirit.

Finally, let me share a piece of information that I find very interesting. R. Álvarez (2015) tells us that every year in autumn, the monarch butterfly

"travels around 5,000 kilometers, from Canada to the forests in the state of Michoacán in Mexico. It's the insect with the most extensive migration, and this generation of migratory butterflies is the longest of all generations, which makes it a unique species."

This makes me reflect on the big responsibility we have of equipping our children for the flight that they will undertake in due time. In parenting well, we will enjoy seeing our children come home when they visit us, but if we don't do it well, we will remain sad and regretful like the woman who wanted to "lighten" the process so that the caterpillar could become a butterfly. Ultimately, it's about equipping our children for eternal life.

Proposed activities

1. Spend time in reflection to see if you are being overprotective in the way you are raising your children. In the lesson, you have been given help to identify if that is happening.
2. Make a commitment before God to help strengthen your children's abilities. Review section 2.4 to come up with a plan to help prepare them for their own flight.
3. If you were raised in an overprotective home, don't think that there is nothing you can do. For God, nothing is impossible. So, we invite you to pray and ask God to help you overcome your weaknesses.

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Lesson 11. **Warning against today's evils**

*Biblical Text: **Matthew 6:33***

But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Objectives:

- **Commit** to studying the Bible more so that we don't get carried away by false doctrines or fads.
- **Determine** not to allow the enemy to divert us from God's purpose

11.1 Introduction

When we study Paul's letters, we observe that in each of them, Paul writes to a particular church of his time with the purpose of highlighting its strengths. But he also write with the purpose, when he deems it necessary, to point out the dangers that lie ahead if they do something that will divert them from God's purpose.

It can be inferred that in each era, the enemy tries to use strategies to entice the church to detour from God's purpose for it. That's why it's extremely important to review some of those strategies, though sometimes subtle at first, that are present and can represent a danger to the church and to our own salvation.

We will answer various questions such as "What kinds of strategies is the enemy using to detour us as a church?" "How can we identify if we are falling for some of them?" "What can we do to avoid them or get out of them?"

11.2 Development

11.2.1 Nationalism

It's common today to see in various countries that some government leaders "identify" with Christian beliefs. But unfortunately, we also see that their actions in government contradict biblical principles. That's why it's important not to divide ourselves as Christians by certain government leaders or political parties.

Many may be blinded by government leaders who sweeten their ears with religious speeches, but they don't realize that their testimony unmask their true identity. Jesus has warned us about taking care of those liars who pretend to speak for God, those who come disguised as sheep, but inside they are ferocious wolves. He himself told us that we will recognize others by their actions, because the good tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can the bad tree bear good fruit.

We must be careful not to put our hope in political parties, believing that they can save us and restore our city, state or nation. Many political leaders have created an alliance with leaders of their country, like someone entering into a marriage with benefits. It's in their best interest to have your approval, but Christian leaders cannot deviate from their responsibilities as the body of Christ and shouldn't entrust the government with the tasks that Christ entrusted to the church.

11.2.2 Social injustice

In many sectors of society, we see people treat others with tyranny, discrimination and social injustice, especially the poor, children, women, and those who come from rural areas. You can see how these people who come from rural areas are abused by being assigned jobs that require heavy labor and being paid unfairly low wages for their work. That is a sin. They are humans, created in the image of God, just like you. Did Christ die only for those of a certain skin color? Or only for those who have a lot and not for those who have less? Or for men and not women?

Yes, it is true that we are the People of God since we were purchased by Him through his blood. We are a chosen family, called to be in the service of the king and to be a holy nation. But all of this is so that we can announce God's amazing works, not for us to use for our own benefit.

Those of us who follow Christ must remember that our calling is to love and care for the needs of others, and that this call doesn't depend on immigration status, country of origin, skin color, or gender. Loving our neighbor isn't just refraining from committing injustices against others, but reviewing and restructuring the policies and laws that oppress them. This is the function of the church! We must be the voice of those who are oppressed.

We're not asked to rebel against the leaders God has placed in our country, but rather to live as good citizens on earth, but never at the expense of our Heavenly Kingdom. Don't pledge your allegiance to the rulers of this earth, but rather give your total allegiance to Christ and His kingdom. Our responsibility is also to pray for those who are oppressed.

Remember that social justice isn't an optional complement to evangelism and the mission of Christ. Social justice is the love of Christ manifested in acts that liberate the oppressed. They aren't interested in the good news if the good news doesn't lead to a just world.

11.2.3 Cheap Grace

God, in his goodness, justified us by grace through the work that Christ Jesus did. God made Christ, by shedding his blood, the instrument of forgiveness and made it available to us through faith.

But sadly, you hear that some have advertised a cheap grace, which they "sell" for a discounted price as a second-hand trinket. Some preach salvation effortlessly, focusing on the benefits of being awarded grace. From their pulpits, they teach forgiveness without requiring repentance, invite baptism without demanding spiritual discipline, and allow communion without confession. After all, they think that grace by itself does everything, so it's not necessary for the Christian to change his way of life. This isn't true! We have been taught that God declares man righteous also by his acts when combined with his faith. Just as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith is dead if there are no works.

Brethren, cheap grace is a mortal enemy of our church. It's imperative that the Christian deny his desires, practice modesty, and that his life be distinguished from the world's way of living. If not, it would be better if they didn't call themselves followers of Christ so that they don't confuse those who genuinely seek him.

Beloved, grace is free, but it is by no means cheap! It's very valuable because it costs man his life and it's grace because it gives man eternal life. It's costly because it condemns sin, and it's grace because it justifies the sinner. Above all, it's costly because it cost God the life of His Son, and what has cost God a lot cannot be cheap for us.

It's grace because God didn't spare his Son as a very expensive price to pay for our lives, but he gave him up for us. Costly grace is the incarnation of God. Let's get busy fighting for the grace that costs!

11.2.4 The false prosperity gospel

Today it's also common to hear that many have preached the prosperity gospel. The prosperity gospel falsely advertises that God offers material prosperity and earthly riches to those who seek him. In their churches, they encourage their followers to pray for, and even demand, material enrichment from God.

Brethren, when Paul affirmed that "though he [Jesus] was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich," he was teaching that since Christ accomplished so much for us through the atonement, we should empty ourselves of our riches in service to the Savior. That's why Paul encourages us to give our wealth to our brothers and sisters in need. Now, perhaps some have been taught to give their wealth to the poor, but the truth is, they give expecting compensation in return. They give anticipating that God will give them more in return. Did the Samaritan ask for something in exchange for helping his neighbor? Or did he stop to think about the return on his investment before doing good?

At times, some have misrepresented the purpose of prayer by using it for their own convenience. They have misinterpreted the words of James when he said, "You do not have because you do not ask God." They have forgotten that we must ask according to God's will and not our own.

Jesus Himself taught us to pray, asking the Father for His will to be done. But some pray to get what they want. They pray selfishly for personal success and material blessings, turning prayer into a tool to "force" God to grant their wishes. By doing this, they have made themselves the central point of prayer, and not God.

Today, Paul might say, "Refrain from teaching this false gospel!" Jesus warned us that in this world we would have many trials and sorrows, and that we would go through tribulations. Although Christ has not promised to fulfill each of our desires, He has promised not to abandon us, but to be with us until the end of the world.

11.3 Conclusion

Beloved, we pray to the Lord Jesus to pour out his grace on us. Let's beg our Father for mercy, so that we can leave any state of lukewarmness and doctrinal deviation.

Let us remember that we must renounce our old way of life and put off what we used to be, since all of that was corrupted due to deceptive desires. Let us seek to be spiritually renewed in our way of thinking, and put on the new nature, created in the image of God, distinguished by an upright and pure life, based on truth. Only then can we achieve the reward of eternal life.

Blessed are the simple followers of Jesus Christ who have been conquered by His grace, who, knowing his grace, can live in the world without being of the world, and are so sure of their heavenly citizenship that they are truly free to live their lives in this world. Act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God. Don't forget that when we follow Jesus, we are called to action, to participate, associate and collaborate with God to redeem, restore and make all things new.

Proposed activities

1. Discuss some other doctrinal deviation that you have observed in your country.
2. What can we do to prevent these false beliefs from infiltrating the church?
3. Explain some forms of social injustice that you have observed that we should avoid.

Lesson 12. **The role of the man as the head of the household**

Biblical Text: Ephesians 5:22-24

Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.

Objectives:

- **Meditate** on the implications of being the head of the household.
- **Analyze** what it means that we should be the head of the home as Christ is the head of the church.
- **Commit** to assume your responsibilities as the head of the household.

12.1 Introduction

God, in his plan for the family, has defined the roles of each member: husband, wife, children. Unfortunately on many occasions, families don't observe these roles. The reasons may vary due to ignorance of what the Bible says, not wanting to submit to God's will, because of the absence of one of the parents, because they are influenced by changes in society that alter these roles, etc.

However, whatever the cause of the deviation from God's plan, what's certain is that it will cause serious problems for the healthy development of that family. But even sadder are the repercussions that will affect the children of these families when they are molded by models that are contrary to the biblical model.

Therefore, it's of great importance that we study:

- The main responsibilities of the man as head of the home.
- What can happen in case of the man not assuming that role.

12.2 Development

12.2.1 Christ must be our head. Romans 7:2; 1 Corinthians 11:3; Genesis 2:24

We must be aware that the role as head of the woman depends on Christ in turn being the head of the man. The word "head" in this passage means the manager or leader. This means that my main responsibility is to make sure that, as a man, I am doing the will of God in my life.

Otherwise, if I'm not doing the will of God, it's most likely that my decisions on how to lead my family will be wrong and that will negatively affect the development of my family. In that case, my wishes will be prevailing and not biblical principles. This will impact all areas of our home: the relationship with my wife, the education of our children, the way we manage our finances, etc.

This doesn't mean that our wife's opinion shouldn't be considered. On the contrary, God made us equal and her input is of the utmost importance. God has given women their own talents, abilities, gifts, etc.

Let's remember the story of Sarah and Abraham, when Sarah didn't hesitate to ask Hagar to leave the house because the harmony in the family had been disrupted. Abraham listened to Sarah and then he consulted with God who ordered him to do what Sarah asked because it was the right thing to do (Genesis 21:8-14).

John MacArthur (2015) explains that men and women "have an equal position in Christ and equal spiritual privileges because we are all united with Him in the same way."

To be the head of the household means that in certain situations, when we're not able to come to an agreement, the final decision is the responsibility on the man. Hence the importance that the man submits to Christ.

We must be careful not to fall into the diversions that are seen today (Mirón, 2011):

- Men who act as dictators in the home. Unfortunately, machismo is reflected in men who care only for their own needs. They get married simply because they're looking for someone to attend to "their needs." They're not willing to help with household chores.
- Men who give the leadership role to women. Some reasons why this happens are (Covenant keepers, s/f):
 - They didn't have a good role model in their home growing up.
 - Some pastors don't teach about the role of the man because they don't want to be branded as being macho.
 - Because they prefer to be lazy.
 - Some men give in to the pressures of their wives. This is sometimes the result of poor decision making, for example, the handling money.
 - Some men allow themselves to be manipulated by their wives.

12.2.2 Loving our wives with all of our being. Ephesians 5:25; 1 Corinthians 16:13-14

What God demands of us is that we love our wives as Christ loved the church. How did Christ love the church? Christ gave all he had for the church, including his own life. That love must not only be words but must be put into action. As an example, here are some ways to show that love:

- Take an interest in meeting her needs, including spiritual ones (1 Timothy 5: 8).
- Support her in her desires that are in accordance with God's will.
- Dedicate to spend time with her, which shows that after God, she is your next priority.
- Try to understand her way of thinking, which will be different than yours, about various issues such as parenting, managing finances, etc.
- Do your best to reach a mutually beneficial agreement when conflict arises, without violating biblical principles.
- Serve her in love (John 13:14-16).
- Take the first step to resolve conflicts that may arise in your relationship.
- Treat her with respect and be considerate, then your home will be a pleasant place to be (1 Peter 3:7).

12.2.3 He is faithful to his wife.

The Bible is very clear about staying faithful to our wives. Unfortunately, we live in a sexist environment in which many men are led astray by the sinful idea that having more women makes you more of a man. Without a doubt, this is one more lie that Satan has planted in our minds to divert us from God's plan.

Many homes have been destroyed by this idea. That's why we must pay attention to nurturing the love between us and our wife every day. Job made "a covenant with [his] eyes" (Job 31:1). He vowed not to look at (or think about) another woman with bad intentions. To protect your marriage, you must protect your eyes.

12.2.4 He is a model for his children. Deuteronomy 6:1-7

One of the great responsibilities of the man of the household is that he should be the priest of the home (1 Corinthians 14:35). He will be held accountable for his children. Therefore, we must focus on:

- Modeling the things you have learned in your own life.
- Presenting Christ as your personal Savior.
- Teaching your children about God's commandments.
- Doing everything necessary so that your children grow-up spending time being nourished by the Word.
- Helping them have a clear understanding about God's purpose for their life.

To the above we must add other responsibilities that will guarantee our children grow-up in a harmonious environment that allows them to reach the full potential that God has placed in each of their lives. This implies:

- Providing for their needs, which includes food, shelter, education, etc.
- Show them love every day.
- Create a safe place for them.
- Establish rules, together with your wife, and stick to them.
- Establish discipline that shapes their life to be responsible and Christlike.
- Spend time with them.
- Help them achieve the dream that God has placed in their heart.

12.3 Conclusion

God designed man and the institution of marriage. Although controversy is often generated about whether or not the man should be the head over the woman, we must be cautious when questioning the model that God has established for the family. We must also be careful not to apply only those parts of the biblical model that we believe "suit us." When we do, the enemy takes the opportunity to try to make us act selfishly, seeking only what is best for me.

As men, we have the responsibility to make sure that our marriage and the family that God has given us isn't destroyed by the enemy. Correctly applying this biblical model will bring us that abundant life for which Jesus paid a heavy price by laying down his life on the cross. So, every time we make decisions, we must think about what Jesus' response would be. God will bless you and your family if you take on the leadership role He intended for you.

As leaders in our households, we must learn to delegate responsibilities at home. Many times, it will be necessary for your wife to make decisions while you're working, for example. So, establish the situations in which the wife can make required decisions without consulting her husband. At other times, when big decisions need to be made, like buying furniture or an appliance, when large amounts of money are concerned, it is necessary to reach a consensus by making the decision together.

Proposed activities:

1. Discuss how you can improve the ways you display love to your wife and children.
2. How can you improve the ways you take care of your wife and children?
3. Explain how you can improve on some of the responsibilities you have as head of the household. Describe a short action plan draft of how you will achieve it.

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