

in search of
CHRISTIAN
CONFIDENCE



**John
Baughn**

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CHRISTIAN
CONFIDENCE

by
John Baughn

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Theme Verse

“Though the fig tree shall not blossom, and fruit is not on the vines;
the labor of the olive fails, and the fields yield no food.
The flock is cut off from the fold, and no herd *is* in the stalls;
yet I will rejoice in Jehovah, I will joy in the God of my salvation.
Jehovah the Lord *is* my strength, and He will make my feet like hinds’ *feet*, and
He will make me to walk on my high places.”

Habakkuk 3:17-19

NEED A CONFIDENCE BOOST?

Do you feel down once in a while? That's okay. Just don't stay down there. Usually the reason a person feels down is because his or her confidence has been shaken.

Even though you may not realize it right now, there are many reasons to feel good about yourself. What you are about to discover, if you are like most people, is that you are probably looking in all the wrong places to boost your confidence. Pop psychology and feel-good self-help advice are temporary. What you need is something that will carry your confidence regardless of what life tosses in your path.

What you need is something that will carry your confidence regardless of what life tosses in your path.

Many people today are looking to boost their confidence by boosting their self-esteem. After all, that's what our great American culture has been promoting for years. From Oprah to our schools to youth sports organizations and elsewhere, good self-esteem is promoted as a key value for well-adjusted people. But our real personal value, and therefore our confidence, can only be determined by someone or something greater than us.

People measure personal value in many ways. Some measure it in cash. The value of a corporate CEO or a first round draft pick in the NBA or NFL draft is measured into the millions of dollars. Their value is based upon what each brings to the investors of their respective businesses or sports teams. These values are determined by the market place, and most of us can't hit jump shots with time running out (especially when a super-human six foot nine inch athlete is in our face). Nor do most of us typically have opportunities to run GM or Microsoft. But even those blessed people don't always find complete personal satisfaction in the job that they do. Most successful people are doing what they do in order to do what they really want, and even then it's not always what they expect it to be in terms of satisfaction. Solomon found that all the wisdom and riches of the world have fleeting value and are vanities.

Solomon found that all the riches of the world have fleeting value and are vanities.

“13 And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all which is done under the heavens. It is a sad task God has given to the sons of men to be humbled by it. 14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.” (KJV)

Ecc 1:13, 14

The apostle Paul spoke to the church at Ephesus about the mystery of Christ. In chapter three of His letter, he said:
“8 To me, who am less than the least of all the saints, this grace is given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, 9 and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ; 10 to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the principalities and powers in heavenly places, 11 according to the eternal purpose which He accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord, 12 in whom we have boldness and access with confidence through faith in Him.” (Ephesians 3:8-12)

Note that in verse 12 Paul speaks about “boldness and confidence.” Every person today would like some sense of boldness and some level of confidence in his or her life. But where can we find such levels of boldness and confidence?

The purpose of this class is to help you find out what God has determined about you. What is your real value, and how is it measured? What criteria are used by God to determine your real value, and what is required of you to meet such criteria? And most of all, how do we acquire this confidence that Paul talks about in a modern world where the things that we value seem to be changing?

Are you looking in the wrong places? Are you seeking confidence in yourself, or are you willing to seek something bigger and better that will give you the real confidence you need? Even if you feel good about yourself right now, how long will your good feeling last? When someone comes along tomorrow and hurts those feelings will you still feel good about who and what you are? Or will they shake your confidence? Will that hurt have short-term feelings, or will it have lasting feelings?

*... are you willing to seek
something bigger and better that
will give you the real
confidence you need?*

Come join us on this adventure and quest to find a confidence that will make you unshakable and strong in the face of the challenges of life. Come see what God has in store for you.

Part 1

LOOKING IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

Theme Verse

“For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise.”

2 Corinthians 10:12

LOOKING IN ALL THE WRONG PLACES

“For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves with those who commend themselves. But they, measuring themselves by themselves and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise.”

2 Corinthians 10:12

It is much easier to find our way through places that are immediately familiar to us than to chart our way through unfamiliar territory. It is easier to find lost keys in your own home than to look for those same keys if they have been lost in some unfamiliar woods. Similarly, when trying to figure out what we need in this life to build up ourselves emotionally, it is easy to look in familiar places. We will often seek to lift ourselves up by looking at ourselves and our personal experiences by remembering what makes us happy. Or, we may look for the help of other people to lift us up.

When we look at ourselves, some of us think that as long as other people get along with us and like us we must be pretty good people. Or perhaps we may feel good about ourselves because we think that we are better today than we were in the past. We think that we are growing and improving over time. When these things make us feel good about ourselves, we rate our personal value and confidence very high. However, that good feeling can go away just as quickly as it came. Such feelings are usually temporary.

A second place wherein we may look to feel good about ourselves is in other people. In such cases, we tend to measure our strength and confidence by how well we compare to the strengths and weaknesses of others. In some cases we feel good about ourselves because the tribulations of other people may seem worse than our own challenges. Or worse yet, we may try to elevate our feelings about ourselves by lowering our opinions about others.

In the short term we feel good inside as the result of these personal observations. By comparing ourselves to ourselves or by comparing ourselves to others, we seem to have a certain “gut” feeling about our own value. We think pretty highly of ourselves when we compare well. But we also run the risk of not comparing very well at all.

We must also realize the danger that pride brings into these types of comparisons. Pride is when we simply think too highly of ourselves. That pride can come from two places: how highly we think of ourselves; and secondly, how well we might imagine ourselves to be in comparison to those who are “lowlier” than we are.

In this section, we will study the pitfalls of comparing ourselves to ourselves, comparing ourselves to others, the deception of feelings, and the pride of life.

Personal Questions

1. What topics of conversation do you find it easy to talk about with others?
2. What is it about these particular topics that make it easy for you?
3. Do you find it easy to talk about yourself? If so, what makes it easy? If not, why is it difficult?
4. Do you find it easy to complain about things? About what do you complain?
5. Do you find it easy to criticize other people? About what things might you criticize other people? What are your “pet peeves” about other people?
6. Do you find yourself more often criticizing other people or edifying other people? For what reasons?
7. Do you find yourself criticizing yourself for something that you did or said? What makes us criticize ourselves?
8. Do you seek out other people’s opinions? Whose opinions do you respect, and for what reasons do you seek out their opinion?
9. What is your reaction when someone is critical of you or mocks you? Why do you react that way?

COMPARING OURSELVES TO OURSELVES: SELF-ESTEEM

“But they, measuring themselves by themselves,
and comparing themselves among themselves are not wise”

2 Corinthians 10:12b

From the youngest in our society to the oldest, we are constantly bombarded with this thing called “self-esteem.” Let’s look at what the users and measurers of this concept say about it themselves.

The term “self-esteem” was first coined by American philosopher and psychologist William James in 1890. It is one of the oldest concepts in psychology. James used it to refer to how a person mentally perceives him or herself as opposed to how a person may be physically perceived. In other words, it has to do with how one internally feels about him or herself and has little to do with any external factors.

... “self-esteem” has become the third most used theme in psychological literature . . . over 25,000 articles, chapters, and books reference the topic.

According to Wikipedia, “self-esteem” has become the third most used theme in psychological literature. As of 2003, over 25,000 articles, chapters, and books reference the topic. It has been determined in all of this literature that the term has basically three major definitions, with each having created its own research, findings, and applications.

1. Again according to Wikipedia, “The original definition presents self-esteem as a ratio found by dividing one’s successes in areas of life of importance to a given individual by the failures in them or one’s ‘success / pretensions.” By this idea, how stable can one’s self-esteem be when potential challenges or failures can occur in one’s life every day?
2. Maurice Rosenberg, a social-learning theorist, defined self-esteem in 1960 as “a stable sense of personal worth or worthiness, measured by self-reporting tests.” One has to wonder how healthy this idea can be when an egomaniac or narcissistic personality could consider himself to be healthy because he feels good about himself.
3. And consider Nathaniel Branden who in 1969 said that self-esteem is “the experience of being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness.” This may come closer to a valid idea of competence or worth, but how is competence determined, and what defines happiness? How does one find this type of competence, and what makes anyone worthy of happiness? A chronic thief may consider himself worthy of happiness if he is really good at what he does.

Ultimately what we can determine is that self-esteem is the pursuit of some type of self-worth measured by how we feel about ourselves.

The world and all of its psychologists would tell us that our self-esteem or personal value is in fact defined by how we feel about ourselves. Though we all like to feel good, the **reason** that we feel good may make all the difference to a person's long-term mental and spiritual stability.

While self-esteem is not in harmony with the scriptural concepts of humility and meekness, which we'll talk about later, there are scriptural concepts that do address how we should view our personal value. But, unfortunately, in an effort to combat this distorted use of self-esteem, we may have lost sight of how one's personal value should be measured.

Though we all like to feel good, the reason that we feel good may make all the difference to a person's long-term mental stability.

With our emphasis on "humility" and "meekness" we may not have emphasized enough of the scriptural and holy concept of "confidence." We, in fact, should be people that feel good in that we have a special "source" of confidence that gives us that feeling. When we clearly understand the true value that God has assigned to us, it will manifest in us a confidence that the world cannot possibly understand until they too can come to this same truth.

In Philippians 4:4-7, Paul makes an inference to this God-given confidence when he says:

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. Again I will say, Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be known to all men. The Lord is at hand. 6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. 7 and the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Maybe it is because the world has not known the confidence of which Paul speaks that it has had to find some other source of confidence: a false confidence and a false good feeling that lies in this idea of self-esteem. Thus, our culture has been teaching us to compare ourselves to ourselves just as Paul spoke of in 2 Corinthians 10:1.

Consider the articles on the following pages regarding the research about self-esteem programs:

U.S. Teens Brimming With Self-Esteem

By E.J. Mundell

HealthDay Reporter: Wed Nov 12, 5:02 pm ET

WEDNESDAY, Nov. 12 (HealthDay News) — Today’s American high school students are far likelier than those in the 1970s to believe they’ll make outstanding spouses, parents, and workers, new research shows.

They’re also much more likely to claim they are “A” students with high IQs — even though other research shows that today’s students do less homework than their counterparts did in the 1970s.

The findings, published in the November issue of *Psychological Science*, support the idea that the “self-esteem” movement popular among today’s parents and teachers may have gone too far, the study’s co-author said.

“What this shows is that confidence has crossed over into overconfidence,” said Jean Twenge, an associate professor of psychology at San Diego State University.

She believes that decades of relentless, uncritical boosterism by parents and school systems may be producing a generation of kids with expectations that are out of sync with the challenges of the real world.

“High school students’ responses have crossed over into a really unrealistic realm, with three-fourths of them expecting performance that’s effectively in the top 20 percent,” Twenge said.

For the study, she and co-researcher W. Keith Campbell, of the University of Georgia, pored over data from the Monitoring the Future study, a large national survey of thousands of U.S. high school students conducted periodically over the past three decades.

The researchers compared the answers kids gave in 1975 and 2006 to 13 questions centered on students’ “self-views.” These questions solicited students’ opinions on such things as how smart they thought they were, or how likely they were to be successful as adults.

“When we look at the responses of the students in the ’70s, they are certainly confident that they are going to perform well, but their responses are more modest, a little more realistic” than teens in 2006, Twenge said.

For example, in 1975, less than 37 percent of teens thought they’d be “very good” spouses, compared to more than 56 percent of those surveyed in 2006. Likewise, the number of students who thought they’d become “very good” parents rose from less than 36 percent in 1975 to more than 54 percent in 2006. And almost two-thirds of teens in 2006 thought they’d be exemplary workers, compared to about half of those polled in 1975.

As for self-reported academic achievement, twice as many students in 2006 than in 1976 said they earned an “A” average in high school — 15.6 percent vs. 7.7 percent, the report found.

Compared to their counterparts from the '70s, today's youth also tended to rate themselves as more intelligent and were more likely to say they were "completely satisfied" with themselves.

There was one exception – measures of "self-competency" (i.e., agreeing with statements such as, "I am able to do things as well as most other people") did not rise between 1976 and 2006. According to Twenge, that may mean that young people continue to feel great self-worth even as they remain unsure of their competence in specific tasks.

Twenge stressed that youthful confidence isn't necessarily bad. "Young people have always had some degree of starry-eyed optimism, and that's probably a good thing," she said. "And setting goals for yourself is a good thing. It's just when those goals are wildly unrealistic, then that can cause trouble for everyone."

For example, young people entering the workforce may score well in job interviews if they exude self-confidence, she said, but that can quickly sour if a new employer doesn't provide them with the perks or promotions they feel they deserve. "They don't set the right goals for themselves, because they are overconfident – and that's when it blows up in their face," Twenge said.

The blame for all this may lie with well-intentioned adults, she suggested.

"These kids didn't raise themselves, they got these ideas from somewhere," Twenge said. With Mom and Dad handing out endless praise, kids today readily believe they are somehow superior, she said. And teachers aren't blameless, either: According to Twenge, research shows that high school teachers now give out an "A" grade more easily than their counterparts did in the 1970s, even though today's high school students report doing less homework than students from that era.

Not everyone interpreted the new findings in the same way, however. Jennifer Crocker is a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan and a longtime researcher in self-esteem. She said that by selecting data from 1975 and 2006, Twenge and Campbell have only presented two moments in time and have not shown evidence of any decades-long trend.

And based on available academic data, today's young Americans might be right to be more self-confident, Crocker argued.

"The fact is that we are all getting smarter – IQ is going up quite dramatically over this same period of time," Crocker noted. "Students may believe that they are getting trained better than they used to, that they are learning skills that they didn't use to have. So, maybe their predictions aren't unreasonable."

But Twenge, who is the author of a book on young people's self-views called *Generation Me*, isn't convinced. In fact, she believes that today's parents may be sending another crop of young Americans down the same path.

"I have a 2-year-old daughter," she said. "I see the parenting of kids around her age, and I haven't seen this changing. Look around – about a fourth of the clothing available to her says 'Little Princess' on it."

High Self-Esteem Debunked Study Finds Social Ills Aren't Caused By Insecurities By Erica Goode, *New York Times*

Low self-esteem is to blame for a host of social ills, including poor academic performance, marital discord, violent crime, and drug abuse.

Or so goes the gospel, as written over the past several decades by social scientists, writers of self-help books, and the California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility, a panel created in 1986 by the California Legislature to conduct a three-year study of the topic.

Recently, however, some psychologists have begun debunking the notion that a poor self-image is the malady behind most of society's complaints – and that bolstering self-esteem its cure.

“D” students, it turns out, think as highly of themselves as valedictorians think of themselves, and serial rapists are no more likely to ooze with insecurities than doctors or bank managers.

At the same time, high self-esteem, studies show, offers no immunity against bad behavior. Research by Brad Bushman of Iowa State University and Roy Baumeister of Case Western Reserve University find that some people with high self-regard are actually more likely to lash out aggressively when criticized than those with low-self esteem. The list of groups – neo-Nazis, street toughs, school bullies – who combine preening self-satisfaction with violence belies the power of one to ameliorate the other.

“I think we had a great deal of optimism that high self-esteem would cause all sorts of positive consequences, and that if we raised self-esteem people would do better in life,” Baumeister said. “Mostly, the data have not borne that out.”

In an extensive review of studies, for example, Nicholas Emler, a social psychologist at the London School of Economics, found no clear link between low self-esteem and delinquency, violence against others, teenage smoking, drug use, or racism, though a poor self-image was one of several factors contributing to self-destructive behaviors like suicide, eating disorders, and teenage pregnancy.

High self-esteem, on the other hand, was positively correlated with racist attitudes, drunken driving, and other risky behaviors, Emler found in his 2001 review. Though academic success or failure had some effect on self-esteem, students with high self-esteem were likely to explain away their failures with excuses, while those with low self-esteem discounted their successes as flukes.

Not that feeling good about ones self is entirely without benefit. People with high self-esteem are happier and show more initiative than those with low self-regard, Baumeister noted.

But when it comes to whether people use that initiative for good or for ill, or whether they succeed or fail in many different areas of life, research indicates that psychological factors other than self-esteem are far more important.

For example, in the studies Bushman and Baumeister carried out on aggression, they found that it was narcissism, self-love, that includes a conviction of one's superiority, rather than a positive self-image per se that led people to retaliate aggressively when their self-esteem was threatened.

In one study, each subject was asked to write an essay that was then criticized by a partner, really a confederate of the researchers. Then the subjects were given a chance to get back at their partners by pushing a button and blasting them with a high-decibel noise. People who scored high on scales of self-esteem were in general no more likely to take advantage of the opportunity than those with low self-esteem. But those who also scored high on narcissism turned up the volume and leaned on the button.

In another study, the researchers gave tests of self-esteem and narcissism to 63 men serving prison sentences for rape, murder, assault, or armed robbery in Massachusetts and California.

They compared the prisoners' scores with those found in other studies for groups of men the same age, including Vietnam veterans, college students, dentists, recreational dart throwers, and problem drinkers. The violent offenders, Bushman said, did not differ from the other men in self-esteem. But they scored much higher than the other men on narcissism. (A third group of prisoners, in Minnesota, showed no significant differences in either self-esteem or in narcissism, an anomalous result the researchers hope to explain through further research.)

Many experts believe that such findings offer a persuasive rebuttal to the claims of the so-called self-esteem movement. But the accretion of evidence has done little to dampen the enthusiasm of therapists, child-rearing experts, and school administrators. Many secondary schools include self-esteem building in their curriculums. Self-help books offer strategies, like hypnosis and dieting, for increasing self-confidence and self-worth.

J.D. Hawkins, president of the National Association for Self-Esteem in Normal, Ill., said that despite the new research his group held that a positive self-image was important and that self-esteem building exercises were effective.

"For 37 years I've worked with kids, and I've proved that those kinds of things work," Hawkins said. But he added that any conception of self-esteem had to include taking responsibility for one's actions and contributing to society.

"If you are not personally and socially responsible, then your self-worth is built on a false reality and, therefore, it's not healthy," Hawkins said.

A preoccupation with self-esteem may be inevitable in a society where self-worth is often defined by a diploma from Harvard, a Size 4 dress, or a mansion in the Hamptons.

Jennifer Crocker, a psychologist at the University of Michigan's Institute for Social Research, argues that the frantic pursuit of self-worth through external trappings exacts a social and personal toll. "The pursuit of self-esteem has short-term benefits but long-term costs," she has written, "ultimately diverting people from fulfilling their fundamental human needs for competence, relatedness, and autonomy and leading to poor self-regulation and mental and physical health."

In a series of studies, the most recent appearing in the current *Journal of Social Issues*, Crocker finds that people who pin their self-esteem on academic performance, good looks, the approval of bosses, friends, or family members, or other societally sanctioned yardsticks are at higher risk for a variety of problems, including academic difficulties, relationship conflicts, aggression, and increased use of drugs or alcohol.

In a study of 642 college freshmen, Crocker found that most students scored high on a commonly used measure of self-esteem. But those who based their views of themselves on things like academic competence, outdoing others in competition, physical appearance, or other people's approval were more likely to have difficulties several months later.

The freshmen who based their self-regard heavily on academic performance, for example, reported more stress and more conflicts with professors and teaching assistants than did their peers. They spent more time studying than other students but did no better in their classes.

The freshmen who were invested in appearing attractive, on the other hand, reported more aggressiveness, anger, and hostility than others, more alcohol and drug use, and more symptoms of eating disorders like anorexia and bulimia, Crocker found. They also became more depressed as the year wore on.

The externally driven students were slightly more likely than others to have low self-esteem, but the correlation was small, Crocker said.

"In analysis after analysis, external contingencies of self-worth, such as appearance, were associated with more problems of all types during their freshman year," Crocker wrote of the college students in the journal article.

In contrast, students who judged themselves by more internal measures like virtue or religious faith seemed to fare better. They were less likely to show anger and aggression and more restrained in their use of alcohol and drugs.

But Crocker said it was possible that even these freshmen found their pursuit of self-esteem problematic. On a checklist of "daily hassles," for example, they were more likely to note feelings of loneliness, suggesting, she said, that their devotion to moral strictures was experienced as off-putting by others.

An obsession with external markers of self-worth, Crocker believes, leads to self-absorption. As an example, she cited a study, carried out with a graduate student, Lora Park, in which college freshmen who based their self-esteem on academic achievement were given a test and then either told that they had failed or given no feedback. They were then asked to talk to a partner about a personal problem the partner was having.

Afterward, the freshmen who failed the test rated themselves as “preoccupied” during their discussion with their partner. Their partners, in turn, reported that they did not like the freshmen very much and would not want to share personal problems with them again.

The correction for such an exclusive focus on the self cannot be found in self-esteem classes that encourage children to believe that they are special and that their personal success and happiness are paramount, Crocker and other experts argue.

“Not everything is about ‘me,’ “ she said. “There are sometimes bigger things that we should be concerned about.”

Yet more old-fashioned strategies for making one’s way in the world, like learning self-control, resisting temptation, or persisting in the face of failure, have received little study, in part because the attention to self-esteem has been so pervasive.

“My bottom line is that self-esteem isn’t really worth the effort,” Baumeister said. “Self-control is much more powerful.”

—November 3, 2002

COMPARING OURSELVES TO OURSELVES

Questions

1. What is one of the oldest concepts in modern psychology?
2. How did William James define it?
3. How prominent is this concept in psychological literature?
4. There are three primary definitions of “self-esteem” in psychology. How did Nathaniel Branden define it in 1969?
5. Ultimately, what is self-esteem in pursuit of, and what is used as the primary measurement?
6. Is it okay to feel good about ourselves? What may make the greatest long-term difference as to how we feel about ourselves?
7. What two terms do we rightly emphasize when it comes to our appropriate attitudes about ourselves?
8. As we look at the idea of personal value, does the Bible address it? What scriptural and holy term does the Bible use to help measure our personal worth and strength?
9. In looking further into the concept of self-esteem, does the research support the emphasis of this concept in better preparing our youth for success? What does the research really say?

Read: 2 Corinthians 10:12-18

1. In the context of this passage, about whom is Paul specifically speaking?
2. Besides those Paul specifically references, when Paul talks about people who “commend themselves,” about whom do you think? What type of person(s) are they?
3. What is the danger in Paul pointing out these people, and how does he address this in verses 13-15?
4. What is the key element that keeps Paul’s judgment of others in its proper perspective?
5. In what ways can we use Paul’s example in our casting judgment about both ourselves and others?
6. In concluding this point in verse 18, who is “approved” and who is not?

COMPARING OURSELVES TO OTHERS

“For we dare not class ourselves or compare ourselves
with those who commend themselves.”

2 Corinthians 10:12a

The second place that people look in an attempt to boost their confidence and personal value is to compare themselves with other people. This method is certainly doomed from the onset. To whom do you plan to compare yourself? Should you compare yourself to the most successful people, the rich and famous, or to the lowly in life?

Our culture (or at least our media) has become enamored with the rich and famous and celebrity worship. Not only must you choose with which celebrity you desire to compare yourself, but with what part of the celebrity's life do you want to compare yourself. Do you compare yourself to the rich and famous part or the drug rehabilitation and public intoxication part? Do you compare yourself to the party lifestyle part or the power and notoriety part?

*Should you compare yourself
to the most successful people,
the rich and famous, or
to the lowly in life?*

Let's bring it closer to home. The reality is when we compare ourselves to others there is danger every time. How many times have you heard people use an abusive or alcoholic parent as an excuse for them to take on a life of victimhood? Often these people tend to duplicate their parent's behavior and in turn become abusive or alcoholic themselves. As unfortunate as these circumstances may be, behavior is always a choice.

Although you may have grown up in an abusive home, you always have a second chance to have a healthy family relationship ... when you become a parent. You can choose to have a healthy family by being the kind of parent that you didn't get to experience.

My college roommate was an excellent example of this very thing. Late one night after we had finished studying, several of us were gathered in our room and we were discussing our role models and heroes. I remember mentioning my father as one of my role models. My roommate, John, also mentioned his father. This immediately got my attention because I knew that his father was an abusive alcoholic. I had heard him talk in detail about the times that he had to confront his father and protect his mother and sisters from his father who had come in late at night from a drinking binge, how he had to throw his own father out of the house in order to keep him away from his mother. So I asked John how he could list his father as a role model. John said that he would be everything in life that his father wasn't — that he would not drink any alcohol, that he would never hit a woman, and he would use kind words toward his family.

*Although you may have grown
up in an abusive home,
you always have a second
chance to have a healthy
family relationship. . .*

What becomes the standard for boosting our personal value and confidence when we have bad role models? When you compare yourself to others, there are always some who are far better off than you, and there those who are far worse off than you. When you place your confidence in another person, he or she is bound to disappoint. Everyone has blemishes. Some blemishes are just deeper than others and take longer to find.

When we first meet our mates we tend to ignore their downside. We just know what attracts us to them at first. But as the modern divorce rates may indicate, we discover those things that we don't like. Ironically, the very things that attract us are often the very things that cause us problems later in the relationship. The phrase "opposites attract" is true. Certain personality types tend to draw to themselves opposite personality types. They are intrigued and curious about them. We should embrace those differences and understand how those opposite traits help offset our weaknesses and fill in the gaps in our own personality. Unfortunately, when we discover that they are not just like us or that they don't always think the way we think, we tend to push them away. We say they changed when, in fact, in most cases the only thing that has changed is how much we have discovered about them by spending time with them.

We should embrace those differences and understand how those opposite traits help offset our weaknesses and fill in the gaps in our own personality.

I have known many people that I have held in high esteem, only to be disappointed later about their behavior. If you expect perfection in any people, you are certain to be disappointed. People are never perfect and will never always meet up to your expectations. That is not to say that if you understand these flaws in people you can't have an excellent relationship with them. But don't expect perfection.

In the most extreme cases when people compares themselves – consciously or subconsciously – with others, the worst prejudices occur when certain types of people desire to establish their superiority. They attempt to boost their own confidence at the expense of others. Bullies, tyrants, and bigots have made themselves known throughout history by violently attempting to take control over those to whom they consider themselves superior. By comparing themselves to others, by use of their own sick standards, these types of people have caused pain and distress and even brought death to masses over the centuries.

However, I suggest that there is an even more subtle such bigotry that occurs. People who acquire positions of power through various methods have decided that they know what is best for everyone else. These people may be politicians, business leaders, entertainers, academics, or religious leaders who consider their status in life to be superior to the rest. They compare themselves to others only to determine that they have the answers for everyone's life. It may come in the form of health care or the environment or international relations, moral issues such as abortion, or other "big picture" issues that the masses cannot deal with themselves without the help of these well-intentioned elite.

Finally, when we compare ourselves to others we must be careful about setting ourselves up as a standard for others. Do we consider ourselves to have all the answers? Are we just well-intentioned, or are we bearing a higher standard that originates from someone or something higher than us? 2 Corinthians 10:17 and 18 completes the thought begun in verse 12:

“But ‘He who glories, let him glory in the Lord.’ For not he who commends himself is approved, but whom the Lord commends.”
2 Corinthians 10:17-18

The great apostle Paul states that the only one who is worthy of comparison is Christ. He acknowledges that only Christ approves who and what is acceptable.

COMPARING OURSELVES TO OTHERS

Questions

1. What factors doom the idea of comparing ourselves to others?
2. What often causes people to become “victims” in our culture?
3. What choices do we have when we are viewed as a “victim”?
4. What is an ironic cause of many divorces in our culture?
5. Will we find perfection in other people? Why? Why not?
6. What can be the most extreme problems of people comparing themselves to other people?
7. What is the danger of the “well-intentioned” elite? Can Christians be guilty of such charges? In what ways?

Read: 1 Corinthians 4:1-13

1. According to chapter 4, how does Paul want the church to view the apostles and preachers?
2. How does Paul not want to be judged?
3. How does Paul want to be judged? Why?
4. Why does Paul have to change the Corinthians' view of him and Apollos?
5. In verses 6-8, the King James and New King James Versions talk about being "puffed up." What is meant by that, and what are the implications of this term regarding our view of other people?
6. In verses 9-13, how does Paul compare and contrast the world's view with God's view of the apostles? Why does he do this?
7. Is this just a backdoor way of puffing up the apostles? Why/why not?

THE DECEPTION OF FEELINGS

And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him;
but he refused to be comforted, and he said,
“For I shall go down into the grave to my son in morning.”
Thus his father wept for him.

Genesis 37:35

On April 26, 2006, seven college students and one staff member of Taylor University were riding in a university van in northern Indiana. They were returning to campus from a school event. Tragically, a semi-tractor trailer went out of control and crossed over the interstate highway and median to hit the van head-on. Four of the eight passengers were killed, and four students survived. One of the survivors, a 22-year-old girl, was in a coma and was badly injured with swelling and lacerations about the face.

The parents of another of the students were told that their daughter Whitney was dead. A few days later they mourned their loss and buried her after a memorial service. As time passed, the young lady in the coma, identified as Laura, gradually came out of her coma but was having difficulty. She initially could not talk due to her injuries. Hospital staff and family kept calling her by her name, Laura, but she would become very agitated each time they did. She reacted in unusual ways to the parents and family members that kept a bedside vigil. As more time passed she came further out of her coma, and it was discovered that responders at the original accident had confused the identities of the two girls. The two girls were similar in build, had the same hair color, and the nature of their injuries made it difficult to positively identify them.

*A few days later they mourned
their loss and buried her after
a memorial service.*

The family who had grieved over the loss of their daughter Whitney was suddenly elated to learn that their daughter was alive. The family that had spent several hopeful weeks at what they thought was their daughter Laura's bedside was grieved to learn that they had lost her.

The family of Laura, the Van Ryn's, put it this way in a website statement: “Our hearts are aching as we have learned that the young woman we have been taking care of over the past five weeks has not been our dear Laura, but instead a fellow Taylor student of hers, Whitney Cerak.” They go on to say, “We rejoice with the Ceraks, that they will have more time on this earth with their daughter, sister, and loved one.”

No words seem adequate to describe the emotions that Laura and Whitney's respective families must have felt. However, one thing is certain: the emotions that each family felt initially were not accurate. The feeling of loss that Whitney's family had and the hope that Laura's family held on to was later offset by the truth. It was the latter emotions they felt that were accurate and based on the truth of the matter.

In the Old Testament, Jacob felt the emotional loss of his favorite son, Joseph, when given the report of his death by his other sons. Jacob was inconsolable. It was many years into Jacob's old age that he learned the truth and was able to be with Joseph again before he died.

*Our feelings are not
a reliable source for knowing
the truth about anything.*

As is evident by both of these stories, emotions and feelings are the result of information given — whether correct or not. Our feelings are not a reliable source for knowing the truth about anything. While our feelings are an important part of who we are, they are the result of given information and not the source for such.

When using personal feelings about “self,” we can see there may be incorrect information that is preventing an accurate analysis of a person’s real value. Certainly, many people have felt good about themselves who are not viewed that same way by others.

*In the world of work they are
expected to perform
no matter how they may
feel about themselves.*

Many young people of recent generations have become confused when leaving the protected world of their parent’s care and controlled environment of school and childhood. When entering the “cold, cruel work world,” some of these youth are shocked to realize that people are not there to help boost their self-esteem. In the world of work they are expected to perform no matter how they may feel about themselves.

These same young people come out into the world expecting a job as an entitlement. They believe that promotions are an expectation rather than something earned. Their self-esteem often takes a hit to find out jobs and promotions are given to the best candidates and performers.

Personal feelings are okay if the information a person bases those feelings on is accurate; but, as we have already discussed, feelings in and of themselves can be inaccurate. So how do we know what feelings we should have about ourselves? How do we know what our real value is?

After looking at one more item about self-esteem, we will show you some places where you can look to develop your confidence and identify your personal value.

The Deception of Feelings
Questions

Read Genesis 37

1. When Jacob was told that his beloved son Joseph was dead, how real was the grief that Jacob felt? In terms of comparing truth with lies, what were Jacob's feelings really "telling him?"
2. For how long did Jacob believe Joseph was dead? (see chapter 45:26-28)
3. How reliable are our feelings? Are they ever reliable?
4. Compare and contrast "faith" with "feelings." Consider what faith is based upon and what feelings are based upon.
5. Is there a role for feelings in our spiritual life? If so, what is it?
6. Which must come first: faith or feelings? For what reasons?

THE PRIDE OF LIFE — EXTREME FEELING

“But when his heart was lifted up,
and his spirit was hardened in pride,
he was deposed from his kingly throne,
and they took his glory from him.

Daniel 5:20

Pride is an extreme form of self-esteem. If self-esteem is how we feel about ourselves, then pride is self-esteem gone too far. The Thomas Nelson New King James Version of the Bible defines pride as “a conceited sense of one’s superiority.” It is this sense of pride that directly correlates to being an unhealthy sense of self.

Daniel attempted to educate the grandson of Nebuchadnezzar about the impact pride had on his grandfather. As king of the great Babylonian empire, Nebuchadnezzar was the most powerful man on earth at the time of his great fall. He went from the heights of power to living and acting like the “beasts of the field.” It was his pride that caused this great fall.

*Proverbs 16:18 says,
“Pride goes before
destruction.”*

When Nebuchadnezzar came to his senses, he repented of his sin of pride, recognized Daniel’s God as the all powerful and merciful Jehovah of heaven, and was restored to his throne. Unfortunately, Nebuchadnezzar’s grandson didn’t learn a thing from this and lost his empire and died on the same night because of his self-righteous pride. As Proverbs 16:18 says, “Pride goes before destruction.”

Pride is one of three evil things that will separate us from God. 1 John 2:16 says “For all that is in this world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the father but is of the world.” We are not to love the things of this world if we desire a good relationship with God, and if we do love those things we are “not of God.”

PRIDE OF LIFE — EXTREME FEELING

Questions

Read 1 John 2:15 and 16, 2 Kings 5, and Daniel 4:28-37

1. Name the three things of this earth that draw us away from God.
2. Who was Naaman, and what was his problem?
3. What was Elisha's instruction to Naaman that would cure his illness?
4. What initially kept Naaman from following Elisha's instruction?
5. What is Naaman's conclusion after he is cured? What did it take to get Naaman healed?
6. Who was Nebuchadnezzar, and what was his problem?

7. What did it take for Nebuchadnezzar to respond to God's message?

8. What is Nebuchadnezzar's view of life after his humbling experience?

Part 2

God and His Promises

Theme Verse

And God said: This is the sign of the covenant which I make
between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you,
for perpetual generations;
I set my rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign
of the covenant between Me and the earth.

Genesis 9:12-13

GOD AND HIS PROMISES

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between Me and you, and every living creature that is with you,
for perpetual generations;
I set my rainbow in the cloud, and it shall be for the sign
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Genesis 9:12-13

It is not enough to know that we may have been seeking confidence in all the wrong places. We have to look somewhere else to evaluate our sense of confidence and personal value. Once we stop looking in all the wrong places, where do we look? There has to be somewhere or something that will build our confidence and determine our worth. Surely Solomon was on a similar quest when he wrote the book of Ecclesiastes. In chapter 1 and verse 2 he said, “‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the preacher; ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.’”

Let’s take a short inventory of what God has attempted to do with and for us:

1. He created us;
2. He has provided for our basic needs;
3. He has attempted to establish special agreements or covenants with humankind through the ages;
4. If that isn’t enough, He sent his son to earth for us; and,
5. If that still isn’t enough, God wants us to be His children.
6. And, beyond all of the above, He hears our prayers.

Over the centuries He has attempted in several ways to set up special relationships with the people of this world; and, specifically, He wants a relationship with us today. The fact that He wants a relationship with us should tell us a great deal about how He values us.

We will now look in detail at how God values us.

HE CREATED US AND PROVIDED FOR US

“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground,
and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life;
and man became a living being.”

Genesis 2:7

God wants us to exist. He made a plan for our creation then fulfilled that plan. But that is not really the exciting part of the story. The really exciting part of the story is recorded in Genesis 1:26 and 27. There the Bible says, “Then God said, ‘Let us make man in our image, according to our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

These statements express volumes about how God values us as His creation. He not only decided to create us, but He decided to make us in His image and likeness. He didn’t make horses or elephants or dolphins or any other creature in His image. He made us in His image and likeness.

*He made us in His
image and likeness.*

God gave us characteristics that are similar to His. He wanted us to be more closely like Him than the rest of all creation. What characteristics do we have that are so much like God?

He gave us intellect.

First, we have intellect. We are given the ability to reason, and we can thus make choices. Free will is a much underrated gift that God has given us, but it comes as a two edged sword. As much as God wanted to create us, and as much as God would like a relationship with us, He wanted us to have a relationship with Him BY OUR OWN CHOICE.

He could have stacked the deck – we could have had no choice in the matter, and it would all be fixed to His favor. But God gave us the ability to choose right or wrong. We can choose to have a relationship with Him or not. That two-edged sword exists because, in spite of God’s desire for a relationship with us, we can deprive Him and ourselves of such a relationship by making our own choice not to do so.

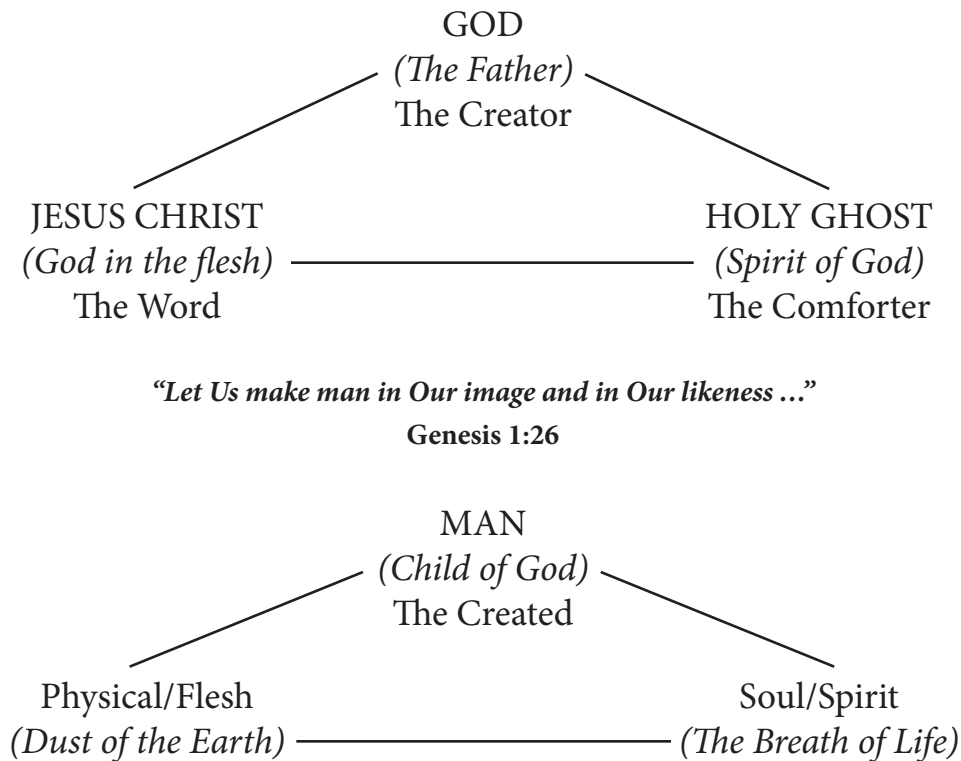
*He could have stacked the deck
— we could have had no choice
in the matter, and it would all
be fixed to His favor.*

He made us of both flesh and spirit.

Secondly, God also made us out of both flesh and spirit. We have a body and a soul, and we therefore exist on two planes. Through our intellect we have the ability to grasp the concepts of flesh and spirit, and of right and wrong.

When God said, “Let us make man in our image,” He acknowledged the multiple parts of His godhead: the Father,

the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The Son, Christ, is the physical manifestation of God; and the Holy Spirit is the spiritual manifestation of God. Consider the chart below to see how man's design is a reflection of the Godhead:



He gave man dominion over the earth.

God gave man a special trust when he allowed him dominion over the earth (**Genesis 1:26**). This trust included a great responsibility for man to care and be responsible for the earth and its plants and creatures. Yet at this point of the story, this is considered to be a part of perfection in the garden. It included naming the animals and having access and oversight of every herb and animal, and all of this required work (**Genesis 2:15**).

God gave man a special trust when he allowed him dominion over the earth.

If you haven't considered work a blessing, visit someone who wants to work but is unemployed or is disabled and unable to work. If you are unhappy about working, remember that work is a blessing carried over from the beginning of time. Work is the provision that God has given us to provide for our families, but it also something that can help us be fulfilled.

However, we must also consider the dichotomy that faced man when he was removed from the garden and work became labor by "the sweat of your face" (Genesis 3:17-19). Adam made a bad choice about his obedience to God and found himself losing the perfect conditions of the garden. This choice changed work from being a blessing to being difficult labor. Because of choices that we make about our working life, work can be either a joy or a curse. It is up to us. Someone once said to find something you love to do to make a living and you'll never have a job.

He provides for our basic needs.

God then made provisions for the man and woman when He placed them in a garden. He blessed them with a perfect environment. This perfect environment in the Garden of Eden provided for the essential needs of man and woman.

Besides the deeply meaningful relationship that God gave man and woman (**Genesis 2:23-24**), He provided for the essential need of food (**Genesis 1:29-30**). He also provided Adam and Eve with clothing, according to **Genesis 3:20-21**. And these promises to provide for our basic needs was reemphasized in **Matthew 6:25-34** when Christ said, “Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing?”

He gave us relationships.

“If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar;”

God wanted to create man, Adam, for the purpose of a relationship with Him. But God recognized two things about Adam. First, He recognized that man by himself without another being of his kind made him incomplete.

Second, God saw that relationships with other humans would be very important. Relationships satisfy the individual’s emotional and physical needs as well as providing a way to procreate and in turn build family relationships. He created Eve, the woman, to meet these needs in man.

But God also knew that our social relationships would serve as a practice field for us. As we use the instruction about relationships that God has given us through His word, we are practicing relationships that satisfy Him. As an example, read **1 John 4:20** about the practice of love where it states, “If someone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen?” If we make our earthly relationships work well, then our relationship with God works well, and vice versa.

In Summary ...

We are made in His image and likeness. Like God, we were given an intellect that gives us choice and reason. He made us both fleshly and spiritual beings. He gave us relationships. He provides for our basics needs. He entrusted us with dominion over the earth to serve on His behalf.

If we stopped here in this study, it seems to me that God has assigned a great deal of value to us already. We could expound even further on these items alone as evidence that we are valued by Him, and thus we are able to establish confidence in ourselves and place a high personal value on ourselves because of all of these things God has done. But wait, there is more! There is much, much more!

Food for Thought:

Before we go to the next section, do this little exercise:

1. Ask yourself the following questions:
 - a. Who in your past have you ever wanted to befriend that you didn't know very well at the time?

 - b. Is there anyone currently that you find interesting that you might like to know or get to know?

2. Write down the things that draw you to those people. Tell why they are interesting to you.

3. Now try to imagine why God, Jehovah, the Mighty Creator, wants a relationship with you!

He Created Us and Provided for Us
Questions

- 1) Name at least three key characteristics of man that make him in the image and likeness of God as recorded in **Genesis 1:26-28**:
 - a) _____
 - b) _____
 - c) _____

- 2) According to **Genesis 2:7** how did God make man? What are the two ingredients?

- 3) What is significant about the ingredients He used to make man? How are these ingredients a reflection of the Godhead?

- 4) **Genesis 2:15-20** and **3:22-24** tell of two (2) important trees that God placed in the garden to which Adam and Eve had access. What were they? Which one was forbidden? Why were they possibly tempted by the one tree and not the other?
 - a) _____
 - b) _____

- 5) What does the story of the trees reveal about Adam and Eve, and what additional ability were they given as the result of their sin? Why would this ability be necessary for mankind's future?

- 6) What basic provisions does God give man in **Genesis 1:28-31**?

- 7) Along with the provisions that God gives man there is responsibility. What two responsibilities are given to man?

- 8) In **Genesis 2:8-15** man is placed in the garden of Eden. Besides the provisions of life that are provided for Adam, what other blessing does God give him in the garden?

- 9) In what way does this particular blessing change in **Genesis 3**, and why?

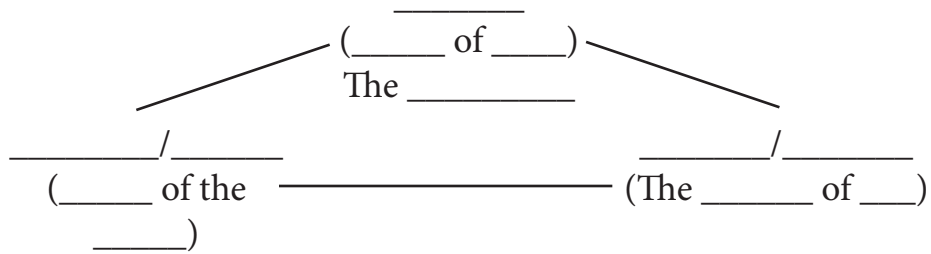
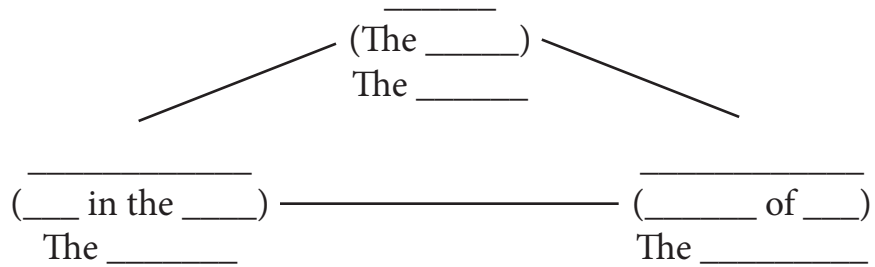
- 10) Of all of the basic provisions of life that God provides Adam, what superior provision does He provide through Eve in **Genesis 2:18-24**?

- 11) Tell why this provision is so important in God's overall scheme for mankind.

- 12) Could God have chosen a different arrangement for man? Could any other arrangement fit what God wanted from man?

13) When Adam and Eve fell in sin, in what ways did God continue to show His care and longsuffering for them in **Genesis 3:21**?

14) Complete the following chart that shows how the make-up of man reflects the make-up of the Godhead:



HE WANTS A RELATIONSHIP WITH US

“What is man, that You should exalt him,
that you should set Your heart on him,
that you should visit him every morning,
and test him every moment?”

Job 7:17-18

God not only made us and provided for our basic needs, but He also desires a relationship with us. Imagine that! The creator of the universe and sustainer of life wants a relationship with each and every one of us!

Try to imagine your favorite celebrity hero or the most powerful person on earth wanting to take time out for you, let alone wanting a relationship with you.

While spending only six years in the majors, he established himself as one of the all-time great baseball players.

One of my biggest heroes while growing up was Sandy Koufax, the left-handed pitcher of the Los Angeles Dodgers. While spending only six years in the majors, he established himself as one of the all-time great baseball players. Before arthritis struck him down in his prime at age 30, he had pitched four no-hit ball games. He won the Cy Young award, the annual prize for baseball's best pitcher, three times. And, as is practically unheard of for pitchers, he won baseball's most valuable player award. I could never have imagined him taking time out for me, maybe his biggest fan at the time. Nor could I imagine him wanting a relationship with me. But at age thirteen how cool would that have been?

And yet a being that is much greater than Sandy Koufax was willing and is willing to give me some of His time in order to have a relationship with me. God, Jehovah, Yahweh, the Almighty Creator, Our Heavenly Father is ready and willing and desirous of a proper relationship with us.

But here is the catch: the relationship that God desires must be based upon His terms and His terms alone. And why shouldn't it be that way? He is the greatest of all that there is. He knows what will be good for us and what will be bad for us. If Sandy Koufax said that he wanted to take me to dinner and get to know me, but I had to get to Chicago to meet him, believe me I would have found a way to get to Chicago! So you see, if God wants a relationship with you, what would you be willing to do to have a relationship with God?

The first time that God wanted a relationship with man was in the Garden of Eden. He created a perfect place for Adam and Eve, and He dwelt there with them. In **Genesis 3:8** it says, “And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day.” And in verse 9 it says, “Then the Lord God called to Adam and said to him, ‘Where are you?’”

Adam and Eve had a personal relationship with God in the garden until it was ruined by sin. As the result of this first sin, God assigned specific pain to Eve and Adam and the snake. But more importantly, He removed them from

God's next relationship with mankind would take on a contractual form.

the garden, and they were separated from Him. If God were to have the relationship that He desired with mankind, it would have to take on a different form from that day forward.

God's next relationship arrangement with mankind would take on a contractual form. When the world became so corrupt that Noah was the only being on earth to "find grace in God's eyes" (Genesis 6:8), God established a covenant, or a two-way agreement, with mankind through Noah. God was willing to do something for Noah if Noah was willing to do something. God would spare Noah and his family from the destruction of the flood if Noah was willing to build a huge boat (an ark), warn the population with preaching, and load the boat with his family and every species of animal (Genesis 6). And, by the way, it would take about 120 years to get this done (Genesis 6:3).

Genesis 6:18-21 spells out the details of Noah's part of the deal:

"But I will establish My covenant with you; and you shall go into the ark — you, your sons, your wife, and your sons' wives with you. And of every living thing of all flesh you shall bring two of every sort into the ark, to keep them alive with you; they shall be male and female. Of the birds after their kind, and of every creeping thing of the earth after its kind, two of every kind will come to you to keep them alive. And you shall take for yourself of all food that is eaten, and you shall gather it to yourself; and it shall be food for you and for them. Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did."

When Noah completed his part of the agreement, God spared him and his family, and mankind started all over again. Consider the importance of this covenant in that through Noah all of future mankind was saved. Without Noah and his relationship with God, you and I don't ever come into existence.

Without Noah and his relationship with God, we don't ever come into existence.

Another covenant was made when Noah came out of the ark. According to Genesis 9:11-17 God established the sign of the rainbow as part of the covenant that showed God's promise to never destroy all of mankind again with a flood. We can periodically look into rain-filled clouds and be reminded of this fundamental agreement that God set with all creatures of the earth.

An important covenant that would define the relationship between God and man was established between God and Abram (who would later become Abraham) in Genesis 12:1-4. This very simple agreement with Abraham would directly impact all of the history of the world from that time on. The agreement called for Abram to gather up his family and leave his home. Even though Abram had no idea as to where he was headed, he trusted God to guide his path and his life.

Land Possession, Great Nation, and a Great Blessing

A threefold promise would be the crux of the relationship between God and Abraham, and it would be passed on to his son and grandson. Jehovah God would become forever linked to these three: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Although these three would live their entire lives being guided by this threefold promise, none of them would ever

see it completed in their earthly lifetime; but they built a relationship with God based upon trusting God to do what He says He would do.

Jacob (who was renamed Israel by God) lived out the end of his life while dwelling in the land of the Pharaohs: Egypt. Ironically, this land would become the place that Israel's children's would grow into the nation of Israel, but they would become imprisoned and serve Pharaoh as the slaves of Egypt. What started with 70 family members (Exodus 1:5) became 603,550 men over the age of twenty years old (Numbers 1:3 & 46). This would not have counted any women, young people under age twenty, or any elderly men unable to go to war. Some conservatively estimate that Israel had become between 1.5 and 2 million people as they moved toward the promised land of Canaan. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew that somehow through them God would grow a family that would eventually become a great nation.

The peak of Israel's national greatness would not come into reality until well over 600 years after Jacob's death during the era of King Solomon's rule. During that time was the fulfillment of God's promise of occupying all of the Promise Land firmly against any enemies (Genesis 22:17) and the population was "as numerous as the sand by the sea" (Genesis 22:17 and 1 Kings 4:20). The entire world during this era recognized Solomon and the greatness of Israel. In spite of all these fulfilled promises, mankind would fail to be in obedience with God's will.

*"... all nations of the earth
shall be blessed."
(Genesis 22:18)*

The relationship that God had desired with mankind would not yet be realized during this era of greatness. The temptation of sin was greater than the attraction of a special relationship with God. The people of this period sought their confidence in the things of the world rather than the things God had done for them. In his twilight years Solomon dedicates the book of Ecclesiastes to the hard lessons that he had learned in seeking answers to his life in all the wrong places.

However, the final blessing of this covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, "that all nations of the earth shall be blessed (Genesis 22:18)," was yet to come to pass. We will explore that final blessing later.

The Law Covenant

Another agreement or covenant between God and man overlapped the great three-fold promise. This agreement was one that God hoped would clarify and strengthen His relationship with mankind. It came into being when, under Moses' leadership, Israel left Egypt and camped at the foot of Mount Sinai. Here Moses had a great debate with God about the future of Israel. The end result was a set of laws that would forever change the history of not only Israel but also mankind. It is commonly known as the Ten Commandments.

You will find the basic Ten Commandments in Exodus 20. But the greater detail of the law and the ceremonies used to worship God are spelled out in the entire book of Leviticus. It was an imperfect arrangement as the writer of Hebrews indicates when he says, "For if the first covenant had been faultless, then no place would have been sought for second (Hebrews 8:7)."

God created us, He provided for our basic needs, and He wants to have a relationship with us.

So God has demonstrated through Adam, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Moses that He desires a relationship with us – a relationship that is built on God’s terms and not man’s terms. But as God knew and we have found out, these covenant relationships were imperfect and not the ultimate kind of relationship that God wanted.

God created us, He provided for our basic needs, and He wants to have a relationship with us. In His design to develop a relationship with us, He had an even greater plan for us.

Next we are going to see how very serious God is about us. We are going to see the great value that He places on us. We are going to see how much God wanted a relationship with us. And we are going to see what that relationship is built upon.

Food for Thought

Write down 3 to 5 things that are roadblocks to you having healthy relationships:

HE WANTS A RELATIONSHIP WITH US

Questions

1. In **Job 7:17-18**, Job raises a very important question about God. What is it?

2. The psalmist in **Psalms 8:3-6** raises a similar question as to God's intent for man. What special things about the relationship between God and man are pointed out here?

3. **Hebrews 1:1-4** describes the various avenues through which God has communicated His desires for man.
 - a. How did God first communicate to mankind?

 - b. What was the second way God communicated to man?

 - c. Through what avenue does God now communicate to mankind?

4. What was God's relationship with Noah according to **Genesis 6:9**?

5. Upon what two (2) things was this relationship with Noah based according to **Genesis 6:8** and **Hebrews 11:7**? Define these two things.

a. _____: _____

b. _____: _____

6. Tell what you know about the relationship between Abram (Abraham) and God that is revealed in **Genesis 12:1-4** and **Hebrews 11:8-10**.

7. **In your own words:** What kind of relationship do we, God's creation, deserve with God?

8. What is a covenant, and why is this term important?

9. Compare and contrast **Psalms 8:4-6** and **Hebrews 2:6-8**:

a. How are they alike?

b. How are they different?

c. What do they teach us about God's attitude toward mankind?

HE SENT HIS SON

“In this the love of God was manifested toward us,
that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world,
that we might live through Him.”

I John 4:9

After God had demonstrated His desire to have a relationship with mankind through covenants and laws, He utilized an even better way of establishing His relationship with us.

I have raise four children, three sons and a daughter. When my children were small I would sometimes stand in the door of their bedroom and watch them sleep. I can remember how innocent they looked in their slumber. I can recall how in my own mind that I would do anything to protect them.

I think about how painful it must be for parents who have had tragedy strike and they lose their own children. I couldn't imagine having to watch my own child suffer in any way. Yet that is exactly what God did

when He sent His son to the earth. But why would God place himself and his son in this tragic position? Why would his son obediently suffer so much?

*“What is man that you are
mindful of him . . .”*

Hebrews 2:6-8 quotes Psalm 8:4-6 where it says,

**“What is man that you are mindful of him, or the son of man that you take care of him?
You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor,
And set him over the works of your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet.”**

When David wrote these words he was talking about God's view of man. He properly wondered why the great creator would have so much interest in mankind. I have wondered that very thing myself. But the beauty of this passage is in the fact that this psalm speaks at two levels. The first level is in the wonderful sentiment that God would give us His time and care and concern. But the second level is pointed out by the Hebrew writer when he says in verse 9:

“But we see Jesus, who was a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that he, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.”

*God loves us so much that
he sent his son to earth for the
sole purpose of a relationship
with us.*

So the second level of this psalm is about Jesus, and it points to the first level in that Jesus became a man like us. Jesus left his home in heaven and came down here to earth to be lower than the angels and live like mankind. As a result we see that God gives us his love and care and concern equally with his love and care and concern for Jesus, his only begotten son. But beyond that, God loves us so much that he sent his son to earth for the sole purpose of a relationship with us. What kind of value can you place on that?

Once man was separated from God by sin in the Garden of Eden, God was in the process of renewing a relationship with him. Each step along the way was a stair step to God's plan for us. With each covenant and each law the plan was drawing us closer toward Him until it required the sending of his son to bring us back to God.

In Luke 20:9-18 Jesus told the story of man who planted a vineyard and then leased it out to tenant farmers. When it came time for the harvest, the owner sent his a servant to claim a portion of the crop. The tenant farmers beat him and sent away. The owner sent two more servants with the same results. Finally, the owner sent his son in hopes that the farmers would respect him and respond positively. But worse, the farmers killed the son in hopes of keeping the vineyard for themselves.

That was a simplified way of telling us that God has made several attempts to build a relationship with mankind, to only be rejected. While the death of the son may seem to be the tragic end of the story, we find that it is actually the beginning of a wonderful story.

God's love for us didn't end by his sending his son to earth, but it begins by his being willing to allow Jesus to surrender his life for us. When Jesus died on the cross, he gave us the greatest expression of love that could possibly be made. He said in John 15:13-14,

“Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are my friends if you do whatever I command you.”

This complete sacrifice is the core of the kind of love that God has for us. It is also the core of the kind of love that God wants us to practice in our lives. Ephesians 5:1-2 says,

“Therefore, be imitators of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us and given himself for us, an offering and a sacrifice to God for sweet smelling aroma.”

We don't have to die on a cross, although being the sinful beings that we are we deserve that kind of death. Christ already died as a sacrifice for us. Two simple things are asked in return: first, that we obey the commands of God (John 15:14); and, secondly, that we imitate the example of God's love for one another (Ephesians 5:1).

This would seemingly be an unequal exchange between God and us, but our God is loving, merciful, longsuffering, and full of grace. Thus, Paul in **Roman's 12:1** appropriately suggests that our offering ourselves as “a living sacrifice” is merely a “reasonable (or rational) service” on our part.

HE SENT HIS SON

Questions

1. **Luke 20:9-18** and **Mark 12:1-12** both tell the parable of a man who planted a vineyard and then leased it to the tenant farmers. Describe what you believe is represented in this parable by the following (be careful about being too literal about the whole story):

- a. "A certain man" _____
- b. "vinedressers" _____
- c. "vineyard" _____
- d. first "servant" _____
- e. second "servant" _____
- f. third "servant" _____
- g. "beloved son" _____
- h. "chief corner stone" _____

2. How does this parable sum up what God wants for mankind?

3. According to **John 15:13-14**:

- a. What is the "greater love?"
- b. What identifies the friends of God?

c. Is it enough to know the truth? What else is required?

4. In what way(s) does **Ephesians 5:1-2** reinforce the points of **John 15:13-14** above?

HE WANTS US TO BE HIS CHILDREN

“But as many as received Him,
to them He gave the right to become children of God,
to those who believe in His name:
who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of man, but of God.”

John 1:12-13

The end result of Christ's sacrifice, our obeying God's commands, and our imitating God's love is culminated in having a relationship with God as his children. Not only does God provide a method for a relationship with us, it is the form of being called his children. This type of relationship implies a level of closeness that is beyond acquaintances and friends. God wants us to be as his children.

Healthy parental relationships have on the one hand a true sense of unconditional love. A love that no matter what happens in this life, the parent will have a special place in his or her heart for that child. That doesn't necessarily mean that either the parent or the child won't disappoint the other. It doesn't mean that a parent always approves of the child's behavior. What it does mean is the parent is concerned for and looking out for the welfare of the child. It also means that when the child does make correction the parent should be the first to forgive and encourage the child.

Story of the commonly called “the Prodigal Son” is an illustration of God's love for his children. The first son left home early and wasted away his inheritance with a sinful lifestyle. The second son remained home and was loyal to his father. However, when the first son came to his senses and returned home to seek the forgiveness of his father, the father ran down the road to meet and welcome him home. There are many important points that can be made about this story, but the one we want to focus upon now is the love that the father gave both sons.

But the father taught both sons about the joy of repentance and forgiveness.

Regardless of how far the first son got away from his father's desires for his life, the father was looking down the road and welcomed him with tears of joy. And as the other son stayed near and was faithful to his father, the father loved and appreciated him for that. But the father taught both sons about the joy of repentance and forgiveness.

*When he sent Jesus to earth
he was sent to seek and
save the lost. . .*

There is never a reason to feel completely alone as long as you are willing to seek out God. Regardless of how you may have led your life up to this moment in time, God, the Father, is looking down the road and hoping to see you coming toward him. When he sent Jesus to earth he was sent to seek and save the lost of the world. And as Romans 3:23 says, “All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.” You're not alone.

Look at what Romans 8:14-17 has to say about this relationship with God:

“For as many as were led by the Spirit of God, these are the sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the spirit of adoption by whom we cry ‘Abba, Father.’ The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs – heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together.”

He tells us that if we are willing to do what is necessary, be led by the Spirit of God and make sacrifices to do so, we can be called “children of God.” It is at this point that many of our religious friends want to devalue what God is asking of us. Or maybe it’s because others may make a bigger deal out of the necessary steps than should be made. The important thing to remember is that whatever God asks of us is only reasonable or rational.

Romans 12:1 puts it this way:

“I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God which is your reasonable service.”

So when Romans 10:10 tells us that “with the mouth confession is made to salvation,” and verse 17 goes on to say that this confession is based upon faith acquired by hearing the word of God, then it is only reasonable that we confess our faith in Christ.

And when Acts 2:38 tells us that we are to “repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remissions of our sins,” it is only reasonable or rational that we should do so if we want be the children of God. How small these simple acts of faith seem when placed by the enormous sacrifice that God made for us. How small these things seem when we know that God gives us life, he provides for our needs, he has given us free will, he has shown every effort on his part to have a relationship with us, he sent his son to die for our sins, and he wants us to be his children.

*... it is only reasonable ...
that we should do so if we want
to be the children of God.*

Isn’t it reasonable that we should be willing to confess the name of Jesus, change our lives through repentance to be in compliance with God’s desires for us, and be baptized in order to cleanse us of our sins? And remember, we haven’t earned anything by fulfilling our part of this agreement because it is still only by the grace and mercies of God that we receive all of the promises of God.

We could stop right there and have made a pretty good case for how our personal value could be measured. It is not measured by our own self-esteem or by the esteem that others give us, but by how God esteems us. However, there is still more to the story and so much more about His grace toward us.

HE WANTS US TO BE HIS CHILDREN

Questions

1. What is God's motive to make us His children? (Clue: **John 1:12-14**)

2. In the story of the prodigal son in **Luke 15:11-32**:
 - a. How might both sons be a reflection of the father?

 - b. When the wayfaring son returns home, where is the father? What does this tell us about the father?

 - c. What lesson does the father attempt to teach the elder son at the end of the story? Before this, what did the elder son misunderstand about the blessings of the father?

3. Read **Romans 8:14-17**:
 - a. What is the dominating feature of a child of God?

 - b. What phrase emphasizes the kind of relationship God wants with us?

4. **Romans 12:1-2** tells us that total sacrifice is “our reasonable service.”

a. What makes our total sacrifice “reasonable?”

b. In what ways can we be:

i. “a living sacrifice?”

ii. “holy?”

iii. “acceptable to God?”

HE HEARS OUR PRAYERS

“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord,
But the prayer of the upright is His delight.”

Proverbs 15:8

If you want to know how to pray to God, just read some of the psalms that were written by King David. Samuel said that David was chosen to be king because “the Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart (**1 Samuel 13:14**).” And while there are several reasons that God had such feelings for David. One of the prime reasons is found in many of David’s psalms of praise and worship to God. David knew how to pray to God.

Consider these well-known words written by David in his most famous psalm, Psalm 23:

**“The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.
He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters,
He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name’s sake.**

**Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;
For you are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.**

**You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil;
My cup runs over.
Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord
Forever.**

When one reads Psalm 23, a person can sense David’s confidence in God. When he prays for comfort and protection he does it as one who has already received it. He states, “surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life,” as a person who knows that God will answer his prayer.

David had serious challenges in his life. If we measured his life by this one psalm we miss the most important part of his story. David went from being a shepherd boy to being a famous warrior to being a king. David’s best friend, Jonathon, was the son of King Saul, a man who tried to kill him on several occasions. And yet David would not

retaliate against King Saul because God had made Saul king of Israel. He patiently waited for God to move in His own time and remove Saul in order to then become king himself.

In many ways David was an unlikely role model for the followers of God. He committed adultery and murder. He had terrible problems with his grown rebellious children. And, God would not allow him to realize his greatest dream, the building of the Lord's temple.

Yet David is honored down through the ages as the one specially chosen by God. He was the type for the messiah who would deliver the people of God from the clutches of sin and evil of the world. It was David's throne that became the symbol for the messiah's place to ascend.

So when we read of David and his weaknesses and his problems, we too can take comfort regardless of our own personal challenges – if we will only love God like David did and pray the way David did and worship the way David did, God will deliver us too. God wants to answer our prayers. We just have to ask for the right things based on what we know about God.

God even provided a “fail-safe for our prayer life. Consider **Romans 8:26**:

“Likewise the Spirit also helps in our weakness. For we do not know what we should pray for as we ought, but the Spirit Himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.”

As we had discussed previously, the Holy Spirit provides an avenue through which our prayers are translated before God's throne in such a way as to plea our case before God even better than we are capable.

Additionally, we are given a supreme high priest and advocate before the throne of God in Christ Himself. Christ became an advocate for us while he was yet on this earth. In **John 17:20-26**, He prays for “those who will believe in Me (Christ) through their (apostles) word.” He goes on to ask God that “they may also be one in Us...that they may one just as We are one (**21, 22**).” He, being God on earth, had the ability to actually pray for each of us (even perhaps by name) who would come to Him down through the generations through the deliverers of the Word.

Hebrews 7:2-28 makes reference to Christ as a different type of High Priest. He is an unchangeable and forever-living High Priest that makes “intercession” or prayer on our behalf (v.25). The very Son of God stands in the throne room to declare our pleas before God's seat. **Hebrews 4:15-16** clearly describes Christ as being a High Priest who understands and sympathizes with our weaknesses because He “was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin.” He is perfect in all points and therefore a perfect advocate because He knows us and he knows what we go through as humans.

HE HEARS OUR PRAYERS

Questions

1. In your own words tell what is meant by the Proverb writer in **Proverbs 15:8** when he says: **“The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination to the Lord, but the prayer of the upright is His delight.”**
2. When reading **Psalm 23** and others of his psalms, what is reflected in David’s prayer-life that might tell us a reason that he was a man after God’s heart?
3. In **Acts 12:5** for what or whom does the church pray? In what way(s) were their prayers answered later in the chapter (**verse 11-17**)?
4. In **Acts 10** we see that Cornelius is not a Christian, but he is a devout man who prays to God. Does God hear his prayers?
5. What do you suppose Cornelius prayed for? Does this make a difference?
6. Who aids us in our prayers?
7. In what ways do they aid us?

Part 3

JESUS AND HIS LOVE

Theme Verse

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son,
that whoever believes in Him should... have everlasting life.”

John 3:16

CHRIST AND HIS LOVE

“Greater love has no one than this, to lay down one’s life for his friends.

You are my friends if you do whatever I command you.”

John 15:13-14

Now that we have seen the value that God assigns to us, we will now examine four particular aspects of His Son, Jesus, who is the Christ, the Messiah, and the Savior of the world. We will look at His perfect example. We will examine His powerful teaching. We will take in His sacrificial love. And we will see why He is coming back for us.

Christ was God living in the flesh. He showed us a perfect way of living by balancing both a physical and spiritual existence. We see his fleshly side through His relationships, His emotions, His pain, His joy, His temptations, and His death. We in turn are able to see His deity by the way he lived, how He performed miraculous deeds, how He was one with God, and how He came back from the grave. But we also see His spirituality by the ways that He loved, the ways that He trusted, the ways that He obeyed, and the ways that He dealt with temptation and evil. Throughout His life, Christ showed mankind an earthly existence on a spiritual level that was beyond previous human understanding. And yet, He also gave mankind the supreme example of humility by sacrificing so much in order to show all people a higher existence.

Paul told the church at Philippi:

“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made himself of no reputation, taking on the form of a bond-servant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on the cross.”

—Philippians 2:3-8

When considering the above scripture, there must have been times that, for our sake and our learning, Christ set aside His God-side and chose to perform on His human-side. There were certainly many times He could have just acted as God and all would be set aright, but instead He understood that we needed to learn from Him on a human basis. He also had to perform His life in all aspects of being human in order to be our total and perfect advocate to God’s throne. He also chose not to cheat temptation by allowing His God-side to be dominant at those times. With this context, consider Matthew 4:1-17 and think about why the things that Satan presented to Christ would be such a temptation to him unless Christ is tempted by His human desires.

All of these factors contribute to making Him the perfect example for mankind.

CHRIST AND HIS LOVE
Questions

1. There are two sides of Christ that we see through scripture:

a. In what ways do we see His _____ side?

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

iv. _____

v. _____

vi. _____

b. In what ways do we see His _____ side?

i. _____

ii. _____

iii. _____

iv. _____

v. _____

2. According to **Philippians 2:3-8**:

a. What should be in our mind that was in the mind of Christ Jesus?

b. When was Jesus in the form of God?

c. Why was it okay for Him to consider himself equal with God?

d. If we are to try to be like Christ, can we consider ourselves equal with God? Why? Why not?

- e. What is meant by “...made Himself of no reputation?”
- f. In what way was Christ a bondservant?
- g. In what way was He “in the likeness of men?”
- h. In what way was He obedient, and how far did His obedience go?

HIS PERFECT EXAMPLE

“For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us,
that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.”

2 Corinthians 5:21

First and foremost, it is an unreasonable expectation to think that you can live a perfect life. From birth to death, we go through a series of physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual changes. There are many passages of life through which we pass. And, at any given time, we are each at a different place on the road of life.

Babies have entirely different needs than teenagers. The older man, while having vivid memories of the way his body once functioned as a young adult, still realizes that he cannot run as fast, walk as far, or stoop or climb as agilely as he once did. Older ladies may look in the mirror to start their day and recognize that feminine “glow” that they had as a younger woman isn’t as bright or smooth or soft as it once was.

These things are a physical manifestation of where we are in life. I actually remember one day looking in the mirror at myself and trying to answer the question, “When did I get this old?” When did my hair become so grey? When did my physical body change so much that I find myself trapped in this arthritic overweight body?

But we also recognize the social, mental, and emotional changes that we go through in this life. Would you go back in time in order to suffer through the same awkward social changes that we all went through as a teenager? What if you could go back to the teenage and young adult years with the social skills and knowledge of life that you now have? How different would that be?

In spite of what our own teenage children may think, we should be much more intellectually developed than they in order to counsel and train up them in their personal development. On the other hand, if children didn’t physically grow and mature we would certainly think there is something wrong with them. Then why is it that we don’t understand that in matters of faith, that many of the same principles apply?

When we are first converted to believing in the Lord and His teachings, is it reasonable to expect full maturity in the Lord, or does our faith go through phases of growth and development? Do we all have the same level of faith? Can we all be alike in all ways? Of course we cannot. Sometimes we grow, sometimes we fall back in our faith, but we are never at the same level of faith all the time. It is an unreasonable expectation to think that you can live the perfect life all the time. Consider **Hebrews 5:12-14**:

“For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need milk and not solid food. For everyone who partakes only of milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. But solid food belongs to those who are full of age, that is, those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.”

The Hebrew author shows a clear understanding of the various levels of spiritual maturity. The Bible also makes references to the “strong” who should look out for the “weak” (**Romans 15:1**). Christ, in His parables of the talents as recorded in **Matthew 25:14-30**, acknowledges that some are held to higher standards than others. And in **Luke 12:48**, when Jesus places a greater responsibility upon those to whom more has been given, He teaches about the expectations of the more spiritually mature.

But ultimately, John sheds even more light on this idea of spiritual perfection or completeness in his epistles. For example, in **1 John 1:8** he says, “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.” In **verse 10** he is even more emphatic, “If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us.”

But in between these two statements, in **verse 9** John says, “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.” So while we see that we are not perfect, we have a way to be made perfect or complete.

John goes on to be even clearer in **1 John 2:1-3**:

“My little children, these things I write to you, so that you may not sin. And if anyone sins, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”

According to *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, the Greek word translated “propitiation” signifies “an expiation, a means whereby sin is covered and remitted.” In the above passage in particular, the sacrifice of His death is the personal means by which “God shows mercy to the sinner who believes.”

Christ is the appropriate means for this propitiation because He was perfect in all things. It is Christ in our lives that makes us perfect, or complete. Christ, in His own words, in **John 17:23**, when praying to God on behalf of the believers says,

“I in them and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.”

Hebrews 7:28 reinforces this idea by describing how Christ is the better replacement for the high priest of the old law:

“For the law appoints as high priests men who have weaknesses, but the word of the oath, which came after the law, appoints the son who has been perfect forever.”

Earlier in the book, this same **Hebrews** writer said:

“Seeing then that we have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our confession. For we do not have a high priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.” Hebrews 4:14-16

This passage makes no guarantee of a perfect or unchallenged and carefree life. But it does guarantee that when challenges come our way there is one to whom we can go who will make a plea before the throne of God on our behalf.

Christ is the perfect example for us. He is the ultimate example of how to live a spiritually full life. We are not and never will be perfect creatures without Him. But with Him filling the gaps in our lives we can be perfect in the eyes of God. As our propitiation, He gets us into the right relationship with a faithful and longsuffering God regardless of where we are in our personal journey of faith.

As we grow in Christ, we grow in our ability to understand God's will more deeply. However, as we grow and mature, challenges that come our way seem to often grow in complexity. But as we grow in our faith, Christ helps us become more capable of handling those challenges and still live a righteous life. We may not be perfect in our conduct every moment of every day, but with Christ it will be a righteous life. If we are continuing to grow in the knowledge, understanding, and wisdom of the Word we will grow into being more like Christ. As **John 1:14** tells us, this perfect example of Christ is "the Word."

While it may be unreasonable for us to live a perfect life, there is one who did. Jesus set the standard. Even greater than understanding how he gives us the standard for which we are to strive, it is that same perfect life that makes us perfect. It is Christ that is our propitiation. Does that mean that we cannot fall from grace? Indeed not. As Paul said in **Galatians 5:4** we can "**fall from grace**" when we are separated or are estranged from Christ. We know that our sins separate us from God, and yet all have sinned. So which is it? Are we sinners or are we saints? Does it depend on each given moment of our life whether we are in or we are out?

This a three-step process

1. First and foremost, we must confess that Jesus is the son of God. **1 John 4:15,16, 5:5; John 14:6.**
2. Keep His commandments. **1 John 5:2,3.**
3. When we sin, pray for forgiveness so that sin doesn't lead to separation from God. **1 John 5:14-17.**

By doing the above, then we will continue to walk in His light. "**He who says he abides in Him ought to walk just as He walked**" (**1 John 2:6**). And **Amos 3:3** asks the question, "**Can two walk together unless they are agreed?**"

HIS PERFECT EXAMPLE

Questions

1. What kind of changes do people go through in their lives? At which point would you think each aspect of life is normally at its peak? (Is that always true?)

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____
- d. _____

2. When considering **Hebrews 5:12-14**:

- a. What had happened to these saints that would cause them to need again to be taught the first principles?

- b. What is recognized by the writer about parts of our lives, other than spiritually, when he uses the images of milk and meat (solid food)?

- c. What two things aid those of “full age” to discern good and evil?

3. According to **Romans 15:1**:

- a. What are the “strong” to do?

- b. Are the strong necessarily defined by physical age? How are they defined?

- c. What must come second to the desires of the strong?

4. In **Matthew 25:14-30**, why aren't the servants all given the same number of talents?

5. From whom, in **Luke 12:48**, will much be required? Why?

6. **THINK:** If we all have varying degrees of talent and are at various levels of faith, is it reasonable to expect us all to be judged by the same standard? Why or Why not?

7. **THINK SOME MORE:** Will we all be held accountable to the same level of understanding? Why or why not?

8. According to **1 John 1:8** and **10**, who is guilty of sin?

9. If we are all guilty of sin, how can we be right with God?

10. What is “propitiation”, and how does it apply to us?

11. If we are all sinful and imperfect, how is it we can be then have a perfect relationship with God?

12. Who is our High Priest, and what makes him perfect for the job?

13. If He makes us perfect, is it ever possible to be imperfect again? How?

14. What role does grace have in our continuing relationship with God? (Consider **Romans 5:19-21** and **6:23**)

HIS POWERFUL TEACHING

“God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in times past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His son, whom He has appointed heir of all things through whom He also made the worlds;”

Hebrews 1:1-2

“Amazed” and “astonished” are two words that are often used by those who were first-hand witnesses of Jesus’ works and teaching. Many times these words are used to explain the reaction of the people to His miracles of healing and casting out demons. But usually these words are used in describing the people’s reaction to His powerful and authoritative teaching.

In **Luke 2:41-50**, a young twelve-year-old Jesus was separated from His parents on a visit to Jerusalem. When they found Him in the temple teaching, it is said that **“all who heard Him were astonished at His understanding and answers (verse 47).”** Even His parents **“were amazed” (verse 48)** when they saw Him doing this.

From the beginning to the end of His three-year ministry, people were time and again “astonished” and “amazed” at His teaching. At the conclusion of what is commonly referred to as the “Sermon on the Mount,” in **Matthew chapters 5-7**, **“the people were astonished at His teaching, for He taught them as one having authority, not as the scribes” (Matthew 7:28-29).** **Mark 1:22** and **Luke 4:32** use the same terminology to record the reaction of the people when Jesus taught in the synagogue at Capernaum.

When He visited His hometown of Nazareth, the people rejected Him as the Christ, but they could not deny His ability to teach with power and to do great works. Both **Matthew 13:53-58** and **Mark 6:1-6** reveal that although the people of Nazareth failed to believe in Him they remained **“astonished”** at His wisdom and abilities.

The religious leaders of the day who felt threatened by Jesus teaching also recognized His powerful influence on the people. **Mark 11:18** says that **“they feared Him, because all the people were astonished at His teaching.”** And in **Matthew 22:33**, after Jesus confronted the Sadducees about the topic of the resurrection, the multitudes who heard this exchange **“were astonished at His teaching.”**

The officers of the Jews also give testimony to His powerful teaching when they were sent to bring Jesus to the Pharisees and chief priests. In **John 7:45-46** we find that they came back empty-handed and when asked where Jesus was, their reply was **“No man ever spoke like this man!”**

John directly refers to Jesus as **“the Word”** in the Gospel of **John chapter 1**. By this, it is important to understand that it was not only Jesus’ words that taught, but it was everything about His life that taught those who saw Him firsthand. It was His wisdom, His signs, His treatment of others, His reaction to temptation and evil, His feelings, His emotions, and the way He died that taught them. And the record of those events, as kept by those witnesses and

inspired by the Holy Spirit, is made clear to us today so that we can learn the same lessons about living that they did in His presence. In **John 12:48** Jesus says that His words will judge us in the final day. But in **John 17:17-22** Jesus also prays for those who were witnesses, deliverers, and writers of the word as well as those **“who believe in Me through their word”** in that they (we) would all be one in Christ and thus one with God. Therein, is the real power of His teaching.

Jesus said, **“I am the way, the truth and the light. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (John 14:6).**

Jesus’ powerful teaching and signs were undeniable to even those who rejected Him as the Messiah. But by His being a teacher like no other, we can see further evidence of God’s love for us. His teaching is such that Christ stood above all others who claimed to be a messenger of God. He was above and beyond all those who had gone before (including God’s own prophets), those who were teaching at the time of His ministry, and all others who would follow. Amongst Mohammad, Buddha, Confucius, the Popes, the Dali Lama, and all other religious leaders down through history, only Jesus taught what He taught and taught it with all the power and authority of God.

Therefore, another source of our confidence comes in the direct powerful teaching of Jesus the Christ, the Son of God. We can trust what He said; and, similarly, we can trust the chosen ones of His, the apostles, who would teach with the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (**John 16:5-15; 17:20-26**).

HIS POWERFUL TEACHING

Questions

1. What two words are often used in the New Testament to describe the reaction of people when they heard Him teach?
2. What are some of the reasons that these words are used so often by the people?
3. Did only believers and disciples of Jesus use these words? Who else used them?
4. What does this tell us about both His teaching and about those who weren't believers who heard Him?
5. What is it about **John 1** that gives us a deeper understanding about the ways Jesus taught the people?
6. According to **John 12:48**, what will be the standard of judgment for all people?

HIS SACRIFICIAL LOVE

“In this the love of God was manifest toward us,
that God sent His only begotten Son into the world,
that we might live through Him.”

1 John 4:9

As Jesus prepared for His final and most torturous moments of His earthly existence, His focus was not upon Himself. He moved about in the final week and final hours making sure everything was ready and in place for Him to leave the ones whom God had given Him, the disciples. He knew God would cover all of the other details, like fulfilling the prophecies and using the hearts of men to accomplish His final victory.

In His final hours, Jesus gives His disciples their final instruction and guidance. He instructs them about the proper taking of the memorial feast of the “Lord’s Supper” (**Matthew 26:26-30; Luke 22:14-20**). He gives them an example of servitude when He washed their feet following the meal as recorded in **John 13**. He instructs them to love one another and thus, through this love for one another, show their love for Him (**John 15:9-17**). He reminds them that the path to God goes through Him (**John 14:1-6**). He promises the aid of the Holy Spirit as their comforter and guide after He is gone (**John 14:15-18; 16:5-15**). And after He speaks to them in plain language about the need to overcome the world (**John 16:25-33**), He then turns to God by lifting up His eyes and through prayer has a talk with His Father (**John 17**).

He offers a few words at the beginning of the prayer about Himself, but He focuses upon the need to glorify God in the acts that are about to take place. He then spends the vast majority of His prayer on behalf of the disciples who are there with Him and then on behalf of the followers who will follow Him down through time. If you are a follower of Christ who shows that you love Him by the way you love others around you, and you show your love by keeping His commandments, then you are personally and intimately included in that final portion of His prayer.

Even when He goes to the cross, His focus is upon others. And when it’s not on others, He is revealing His human side to us. We can recognize His pain and emotions as human.

There are seven things stated by Jesus from the cross, recorded by the witnesses there. Three statements pertain to others around Him. Two statements show us His humanity. Two statements state the end of His human pain.

1. For those who crucify Him: “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do.” **Luke 23:34**
2. To a thief crucified with Him: “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.” **Luke 23:43**
3. To Mary and John: “Woman, behold your son!... Behold your mother!” **John 19:26,27**
4. “I thirst” **John 19:28**
5. “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?” **Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34**
6. “Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit.” **Luke 23:46**
7. “It is finished” **John 19:30**

While obviously important, His sacrificial love was much more than His final death upon the cross. It included His entire life. It involves His giving up His heavenly home to dwell on earth (**Philippians 2:3-8**). It includes His giving up His earthly family in order to serve all of mankind (**Matthew 12:46-50; Luke 8:19-21**). There are many examples of His willingness to give of His personal time and rest in order to go about doing God's work. His total life was one of sacrifice in order to do God's will and to serve mankind with His example, signs, and teaching.

Food for thought:

List 3 to 5 things you could give up in order to do God's work.

How much of a sacrifice would it really be to give up these things? Is it really sacrifice or a lack of convenience that holds us back?

Now list 3 to 5 things that would actually be a sacrifice for the Lord's work:

Do any of the above things seriously trouble you in the giving up? If so, now we're talking about sacrifice.

HIS SACRIFICIAL LOVE

Questions

1. What seven things does Jesus say in the final hours before His death?

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

d. _____

e. _____

f. _____

g. _____

2. In His prayer as recorded in **John 17**, why does Jesus ask God to glorify Him (Jesus)?

3. What does he conclude about His work on earth?

4. Who is the primary focus in the body of His prayer? What does He pray for them?

5. For whom does He pray so intimately in the closing portion of His prayer? What does He pray for them?

6. What does each of Christ's phrases from the cross tell us about the character and essence of Christ?

a. "Father forgive them..." _____

b. "...you will be with Me..." _____

c. "...behold your son..." _____

d. "My God, My God..." _____

e. "Father, into your hands..." _____

f. "It is finished." _____

HE IS COMING BACK FOR US

“In my father’s house are many mansions;

If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself;
that where I am you may be also.”

John 14:2-3

After Jesus had prepared His disciples in the final hours, and after He had died upon the cross, He shows them God’s power over death and gives them the blessed hope of the resurrection by coming back from the grave three days later. He spends several days with His disciples until He ascends into heaven (**Mark 16:20; Luke 24:50-53; Acts 1:9-11**) and sits down at the right hand of God.

Let’s examine the ending of each of the Gospels and see what they tell us about Jesus and the disciples after the events of Jesus’ life on earth have ended:

Matthew 28:9-20: Matthew wrote from the perspective of Jew to an audience of Jews. His message emphasizes Jesus as the Christ and Messiah. The ending that he chooses for his version of the Gospel was the great commission in which the concluding idea is to spread the message of Christ’s authority and to make a new nation that transcends borders and tribes and ethnicity. The mission was to convert others through the teaching of and example of Christ and to begin a never-ending chain of passing the message on to others.

Mark 16:14-20: Although Jewish in origin, John Mark was on the front lines with Paul and Barnabas in the mission to the Gentiles. The conclusion of Mark’s gospel begins with the great commission, but includes the signs and wonders that were part of the evidence and teaching tools that they took to the world. He also gives a brief glimpse into the throne room of heaven where Christ “sat down on the right hand of God.” He shows that Jesus takes the position of power and authority at the Supreme Ruler’s right hand. He then simply says that the disciples did what was asked, “... they went out and preached everywhere ...”

Luke 24:36-53: Luke wrote both this Gospel and the book of **Acts** to Theophilus to give an “orderly account ... that you may know the certainty of those things.” His approach to the Gospel story is measuring the cost of discipleship versus the cost of unbelief. He closes the story of Christ with the details of Christ opening up the minds of the disciples to scriptures (**Luke 24:45**), a form of the great commission, and then telling them to wait in Jerusalem for the “power from on high.” And finally, describing Christ’s ascension. He reviews that event in his introduction to the book of **Acts** and picks up the story of the early church from there.

John 21:15-25: John’s Gospel is a story of evidence for the belief of the saints. **John 20:31** sums up the book by saying “... these (signs) are written that you may believe ...” John writes with a very personal touch. He also writes as an eyewitness, and he concludes the events with his last time with Jesus before Christ’s ascension. In **John 21:24** he closes as one who “wrote these things; and we know that his testimony is true.” He ultimately concedes that he could have written more, but “even the world itself could not contain the books that would be written. Amen.”

So as we compare these last moments of Christ’s time on the earth, we see each has a unique perspective; but all are consistent with one another. We see personal time spent and final instruction given and Christ’s ascension to the right hand of God in heaven. **But what now?**

Luke gives us some more detail in his sequel to the Gospels, the book of **Acts**. In **Acts 1:11** the disciples are still gazing upward as Jesus disappears into the clouds, and what appears to be an angel says, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven.”

Jesus had alluded to his coming back in **John 14:2-3**:

“In my father’s house are many mansions; If it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am you may be also.”

Paul gives some detail of the events around the return of Christ. In **1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:11** Paul gives the order of things to occur upon Jesus’ return and then spells out specific instruction as to being ready for the day to come even though it will come as “as thief in the night” (**1 Thessalonians 5:1**).

Paul gives two reasons for being comforted and confident in the second coming of Christ. First, those loved ones who have gone before us “who sleep in Jesus” (**4:14**) will be taken care of and will rise to meet Him. And, secondly, those of us who are alive and are “sons of light” (**5:5**) and who “watch” and are self-controlled (**5:6**) will be prepared to meet Him on that ominous day. Paul tells the Thessalonians these things so they can “comfort and strengthen one another” (**5:11**).

According to this same passage, we find there will be no doubt as to what is happening on the day of Christ’s return:

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.”
1 Thessalonians 4:16

Also, let there be no doubt as to what the emotional reaction will be by various groups of people on that final day. Although all mankind will quake in that final day, there are three possible reactions that people will have:

1. Those who watch and are sober and are expecting these events will be awestruck but will end up joyful.
2. Those who are unbelievers or believed and failed to walk with God will be terrified by what awaits them that day.
3. There will be some who are confused. These may be the saddest of all. They are the ones who followed the commands of men instead of God and thought they were in good standing with God. Yet, they are rejected on that day when He says, “I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness” (**Matthew 7:21-23**).

So, when we talk about our Christian confidence there is only one group that will have the assurance of heaven on that final day. That group will consist of those who seek to do the will of God. They are those who practice the example and teaching of Christ in their relationships with other people. And, although they may not be perfect in all they do, they have a confident relationship with God because they know that Christ has made them complete in the Lord.

One segment of the world describes modern Christianity as violent, bigoted and oppressive. Another segment presents Christianity as a system to attain personal success and material wealth. The rest of the world declares that good self-esteem and faith in the human spirit is the answer to life's questions. It is in these worldly pressures that we sometimes find our confidence shaken and we begin to wonder why we do what we do. We wonder why the world seems happy and as a Christians we are subject to being unhappy and down at times.

"In search of Christian Confidence" is a series of lessons to examine God's plan for mankind and how He values His creation. This study is intended to help us find the confidence that we need to face life's challenges.



John Baughn brings a unique perspective to his authorship of Bible study materials. He has a bachelor's degree from Purdue University in social studies education. He has served in the private sector as a counselor, group worker, teacher and executive director specializing in programs for youth and families in homes, schools and camp environments.

John has served directly on the front lines of politics as a campaign volunteer, an appointed official, and holder of a publicly elected office. He has campaigned with mayors, governors, and congressmen and been in the presence of four different sitting U.S. Presidents. He has also served his community as a member and leader of multiple boards, commissions and advisory groups

But most importantly, he has had a lifelong commitment to the study, teaching and preaching of the Holy Scriptures. John has authored "Exercising Authority," "Ancient Choices for Modern Dilemmas," and "Seeking Christian Confidence."

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