

Session 1

INTRODUCTION



Welcome to Living Light Christian Church’s Vision and Commitment Course. We’re glad you’ve decided to join us and we’re excited at the prospect of going through this course with you. During the course, we will explore biblical truths that for thousands of years have transformed the lives of countless believers, to the glory of God.

THE PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

The course has undergone much change and development over the years, but its purpose remains to establish the essential foundations of Christian faith and experience in the lives of all those who participate. The course also serves as the doorway into the life of this expression of the Church. It provides an opportunity for the leadership of this congregation to express clearly the biblical truths that have been revealed to us. These truths determine what we believe, what we do and how we do it.

This is not to say that this course is only for those that wish to join Living Light, nor is there any obligation on the elders to consider someone to be a part of Living Light simply because they have completed it. However, all those who believe they are to be joined to Living Light are asked to complete the course. You may be here as one who has known the Lord for many years, as a new Christian or as one simply searching for truth. Whichever is the case, if you have a hungry and teachable spirit, we know that God will reveal Himself and His purposes to you in new and deeper ways.

“VISION AND COMMITMENT”?

Why do we call this a “Vision and Commitment Course”? In answer to that question, let’s look at a couple of scriptures:

“Where there is no prophetic vision the people cast off restraint...” **Proverbs 29:18**

The phrase “cast off restraint” could also be translated “go astray” or “run wild”. Just as lack of physical vision can cause us to go off course (or indeed, to not even know that there is a course), so a failure to see what God wants to reveal to us (‘prophetic vision’) will have serious consequences for how we live life. God wants us to see what He sees. We then have a responsibility...

“Write the vision; make it plain on tablets, so he may run who reads it.” **Habakkuk 2:2**

The vision that God wants to impart to us is not a dreamy ideal that is vaguely inspirational but difficult to understand and put into practice. God has a purpose for our lives, which He wants us to see, understand, outwork, and share with others. Therefore, our desire is that, by the grace of God and the working of His Holy Spirit, you will so clearly see the **vision** that has gripped our hearts that you too will wholeheartedly **commit** to it.

HOW DOES GOD IMPART VISION?

“Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” **Psalms 119:105**

In particular, and most reliably, God communicates to us through His written Word, which we usually refer to as “the Bible,” “Scripture” or “the Word of God.” Jesus demonstrated His own knowledge and reliance on God’s written Word in defeating the Devil by resisting his temptations in the desert (**Matthew 4:1-11**).

“...It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” **Matthew 4:4**

We will hand out a paper entitled “The Authority of Scripture” at the end of this session and we will also look in more detail at the nature and importance of the Bible later on in the course. However, it should be understood right at the outset that this whole course - indeed our existence as a church - is founded on the following conviction (quoted from Living Light’s Statement of Faith):

The Bible is God’s inerrant, infallible Word to all people at all times. Human authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit wrote it. As such, it is the supreme source of truth and is a completely reliable revelation of God. The Bible alone is the final authority in all matters of doctrine and practice (2 Timothy 3:16).

Accordingly, our commitment is to root everything we teach in Scripture, which we reference throughout the materials.

THE NEED FOR ‘REVELATION’

You will hear us speak again and again of the vital importance of receiving revelation on what God says. This is more than intellectual understanding. It’s possible to go through a course like this and acquire a lot of information and yet experience little change and growth. That would be disappointing to say the least! Thankfully, it’s not God’s intent. Through the Holy Spirit, whom we look to as the principal teacher of this course, God wants to reveal His truth to you in a way that is impacting and life-changing. Determine to be open and expectant for this to happen.



“Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual. The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” **1 Corinthians 2:12-14**

BUILDINGS AND FOUNDATIONS

It is not enough merely to know what God says in Scripture, or even to have revelation on it. We must outwork it in our lives, individually and corporately. **James 1:22** says, “**But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.**” To help us grasp the significance of how we are to apply the Word of God in our lives, the Bible frequently uses building terms. Jesus likens the hearing and putting into practice of His words to building on a solid foundation:

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.” **Matthew 7:24**

Later, when the apostle Peter was applying this concept to the Church, he said,

“...you yourselves like living stones are being built up as a spiritual house...” **1 Peter 2:5**

And the apostle Paul developed this building theme as follows:

“Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and aliens, but fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.” **Ephesians 2:19-22 (NIV 1984 Edition)**

This theme is so central to courses like this that they have often been referred to as “Foundation Courses”. It is imperative that we heed the warnings of Jesus regarding the devastating consequences of failing to build according to His instruction:

“Why do you call me ‘Lord, Lord,’ and not do what I tell you? Everyone who comes to me and hears my words and does them, I will show you what he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid the foundation on the rock. And when a flood arose, the stream broke against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built. But the one who hears and does not do them is like a man who built a house on the ground without a foundation. When the stream broke against it, immediately it fell, and the ruin of that house was great.” **Luke 6:46-49**



Consider the following illustration:



The house on the right is well-built and has a foundation – but the foundation is in sand. This is like the millions of individuals who are steadily building their lives without a relationship with Jesus Christ, the solid rock on whom we are to build. Ultimately, this house is destined for ruin.

On the lower left is a trailer home. It could represent people who have some knowledge of the truth and would consider themselves to be Christians but are not committed to a lifestyle of obedience. Like many professing Christians of our day, a trailer home has no secure foundation; it may be close to the rock but is not actually built into it. The trailer home is designed for relocation, not permanence. As we all know, when the tornado sweeps through, these homes are the first to go.

The house on the upper left illustrates the building principle that we will focus on for the remainder of this course. It is the house built into the rock, with a clear and definable foundation, that is able to withstand all the elements that come against it.

RESTORATION

This type of commitment to live our lives according to the Word of God could be described as “radical.” The word “radical” is used in many different ways to mean different things. In fact, it is derived from the Latin radix, meaning “a root.” Being radical is, therefore, going to the root or origin of a matter. This is highly appropriate to this course and Living Light in general, as we are committed to seeing a restoration of the root strengths, values and structure of the original Church as described in the New Testament.



By comparison to much of the modern Western church, the standards and goals presented in this course may seem very challenging. In fact, they represent no more than Bible-based Christianity, a return to the normal Christian life of the early Church. We would recommend that before we meet for the next session you take the time to read through the Book of Acts, which clearly shows the radical lifestyle of the early Church. By the power of the indwelling Spirit, this way of life is within the reach of us all.

SOME GENERAL POINTS...

PRESENCE – We appreciate that attending the full twenty sessions of this course is a substantial commitment. However, if you do decide to take the course after this introduction, please prioritize it and determine to attend through to the end. This will be beneficial not only to you, but also to the rest of the group.

PUNCTUALITY – Please try to arrive on time, but if you are going to be late, don't be discouraged from coming. Better late than never!

PARTICIPATION – We want the course to be as interactive as possible, so questions, observations and testimonies are more than welcome. There is no such thing as a stupid question. No one is born with the knowledge of all the truths of God (that's why we need revelation). So determine to speak up!

PREPARATION – There's unlikely to be any set homework with this course, although at the end of each set of notes there will be suggestions for further study on the subject. If you are to receive all God has for you, we recommend that, after each session, you at least review the material, think about the Scriptures, ask God what you should do in the light of what you've seen and heard, and commit yourself to obeying Him. Come to the next session ready with any questions or comments from the previous one.

PARTNERS – Occasionally, we link first-time participants with 'partners' from Living Light who have previously completed the course. The partners usually receive much for themselves in taking the course again, but their principle function is to help others receive the maximum benefit from it. If you miss a session, your partner could arrange a time to go over it with you. You can also ask them questions you may not be able to ask in class, either relating to particular sessions or other matters.

We're believing for nothing less than dynamic, Spirit-filled times of revelation in God's Word together. Be blessed and enjoy the course!



RECOMMENDED READING

Acts

Supplemental Handout: “The Authority of Scripture”

All Scripture quotations will be from the English Standard Version of the Bible unless stated otherwise.

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