

Pursue

Surround

Anticipate

*The **1** Thing*

A passion for Christ

Obey

Surrender

Nurture

Invest

by **Lyle Mullins**

*The **1** Thing*

A passion for Christ

Written by Lyle E. Mullins
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Pursue

OBEY

“Of making many books there is no end,” said the writer of Ecclesiastes. The same could be said for the writing of many Bible studies. It seems that we are inundated with materials designed to guide us in our journey of knowing Christ.

How well do you know Him? Are you ready to embark on a journey to know Him passionately? It is a road that, too, few travel for it requires laying aside those things that hinder our relationship with Him; things that may seem good but, nevertheless, draw us away from His call, “follow Me.”

“For to me to live is Christ” was the apostle Paul’s holy mantra. Expressing his zeal for Christ he said, “This one thing I do, [it is my passion]: forgetting what lies behind and straining forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the [supreme and heavenly] prize to which God in Christ Jesus is calling us upward.” Again he said, “I want to know Him and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings” (Phil 1:21, 3:10, 13, 14).

Here, we meet Christ in all of His majesty and glory. Here, we encounter His wonderful love and compassion. Here, we enter the abundant life imbued with freedom and power— “more than conquerors through Him who loved us” (Rom 8:37).

May you acquire passion for Him that brands your spiritual journey adventurous and exciting.

Cyle

Invest

Nurture

INTRODUCTION

Pressing Forward

What does it mean to have passion? The dictionary defines passion as “a pursuit to which one is devoted” (*Library Of Universal Knowledge*, 522). If we apply that definition to our relationship with Christ, it means to have a holy passion for Him, that is, to seek Him with all of our heart, to desire Him more than anyone or anything.

This is **The 1 Thing** that Paul was focused on when he wrote in Phil 3:13, “**But one thing I do:** forgetting what is behind and reaching forward to what is ahead, I pursue as my goal the prize promised by God’s heavenly call in Christ Jesus.” His passion was to have a relationship with Christ that was unlike anything he had ever experienced. He admits that he had not attained it, but he was making every effort to take hold of it (Phil. 3:10-12).

Let’s use the word “passion” as an acronym to expand upon its meaning.

Pursue
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Invest
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Nurture

Each new word helps us to understand more fully the significance of what it means to have passion for Christ.

We are to **pursue** God with all of our heart, with all of our mind, and with all of our will. This means that our eyes are always on Him. He is continuously in our focus. We are running toward Him like a runner seeking the prize at the end of a race. Nothing will divert our attention from reaching the prize.

Anticipate that God is up to something good in our lives. He is always at work around us. He desires to include us in what He is doing. We should, therefore, expect Him to do great things in and through us every day.

Surrender. If we are going to move forward with God, we must come to the point that we are willing to give up all rights to control our life. God has the plan for making our journey with Him complete. As we consent to His will and His ways, we begin to experience His supernatural strength at work in us.

We should **surround** ourselves with others who have a desire to know Christ. Being with other people of like mind is important. “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17). These relationships help to build us up in our faith.

What better way to instill passion for Christ than to **invest** our lives in the lives of others? Paul said it this way: “In humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone

should look out not [only] for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3, 4).

Obey. When God speaks, we are to respond with a resounding “yes!” This is how we show our love for Him. Our willingness to be led by His Spirit will open many doors of opportunity for us. God is then able to use our spiritual gifts and talents to advance His kingdom.

Our growth in Christ depends on how well we **nurture** our spiritual life. This is realized when we are deliberate in reading, studying, and applying the Word to our lives. It is achieved as we develop intimacy with Christ. And it is attained by developing sensitivity to the Holy Spirit who is our guide and teacher.

Create In Me A Clean Heart

Let’s observe David, who wrote a considerable portion of the Psalms. What can we learn from his life? David was certainly not a man without trouble. He was caught up in a horrendous sin with Bathsheba, ultimately ending in the death of her husband. There was adultery, murder, and a child born out of wedlock. There was treachery from David’s own son. And there was King Saul who wanted David dead. A seemingly dim future for a man who, one day, would be the leader of Israel. In spite of this, David is an example of someone who was passionate about God. God Himself calls David a man after His own heart; and rightly so. Even though this was a dark chapter in his life, God was not finished with this zealous and hot blooded prodigal. He would go on to be one of the greatest kings in the history of Israel.

Do you identify with David? Has your life taken some turns that have left you without much hope? You wonder, “How did I end up here? “Is there any prospect of improving my intimacy with God?” “Could He really restore me to where I have a real passion for Him?” I have good news for you: It is God’s desire for you to have an intimate and passionate relationship with Him.

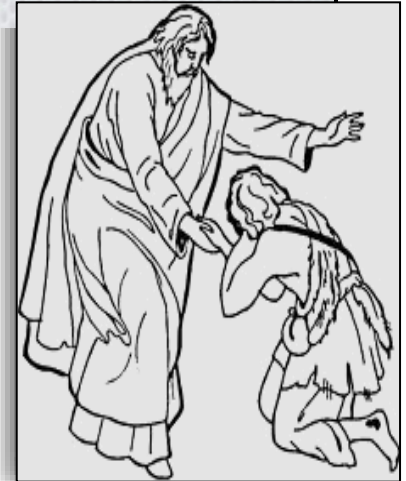
From Riches To Rags To Riches

The story of the lost son in Luke 15 illustrates just how much God loves us and how far He will go to restore us to Himself.

Having all that he could ever want, and yet not satisfied with life at home, the son decides to leave and take his inheritance with him. After some time he loses all that he has and finds himself in dire straits. Embarrassed and ashamed, he makes the decision to return to his father and to ask that he be allowed to remain as a servant. He believes in his heart that being a servant is the best he can expect to receive after all that he has done. We pick up the narrative in verse 20. “But while the son was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion. He ran, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him. The son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight. I’m no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father told his slaves, ‘Quick! Bring out the best robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Then bring the fattened calf and slaughter it, and let’s celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found!’ So they began to celebrate.”

It doesn’t take much of an imagination to picture the son coming home after having wasted his life. In the story we are told that things had gotten so bad that he had to eat with the pigs. No doubt, he had lost weight, and was probably in a ragtag condition. And yet, we see the love and compassion of the father demonstrated as he calls for a robe and sandals to be given to his son. Before anyone else had the opportunity to see his son in this pitiful condition, the

father covers him with the robe, puts sandals on his feet, and places a ring on his hand. Here is a perfect illustration of how God covers our sin and restores us to our rightful place with Him when we repent and return to Him. He does not want to see us embarrassed by sin and walking in shame. He wants us to walk with Him with our head held high and with a passionate love for Him. Indeed, He has provided all that we need to make this a reality.



Reach Out And Touch Someone

What is **The 1 Thing** that has preeminence in your life right now? What are you *passionate* about? I believe God is looking for people who have a passion for *Him*. He wants to express Himself through the lives of those who are willing to yield themselves to Him. As we do, we can expect Him to release His mighty power and His incredible love into our lives. Why? Because He wants to touch the world with His message of love and hope. And we are the vessels He uses to accomplish this great work.

Knowing Him

Paul said in Philippians 3:10-11, “[My goal] is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, assuming that I will somehow reach the resurrection from among the dead.”

Paul’s goal was also his *passion*—to know Christ in every dimension of his life. Being conformed to Christ’s death is the result of surrendering ourselves to Him, which makes available the fullness of life that Jesus spoke of in Jn 10:10. The Holy Spirit provides resurrection power to each of us who have a vibrant relationship with Christ—power that enables us to live our new life in Him.

The life of Christ is manifested through us as we put to death selfishness and look for ways to be a blessing to others. We strive, empowered by Him, to be raised above sin and selfishness and become noble vessels in the hands of God, to effect the salvation of men for His glory.

We see each day as a new opportunity to walk with God. We begin by setting our minds on Him, developing a bond with Him that ignites our passion. He becomes the most important person in our lives. Our love for Him becomes stronger and more intimate, creating an unspeakable joy that fills our hearts. We want to be with Him and hear from Him. What is important to Him becomes important to us. This, I believe, is what Paul meant when he said “I want to know Him.”

Do you want to know Him like this? Is your spiritual life lacking the fervor and enthusiasm to catapult you forward? Do you want to walk with God and be passionate about Him? Are you ready to let go of those things that are preventing you from following Him without reservation? If your answer to these questions is “Yes,” then you are ready for a transformation.

Why don't you ask God to make this a reality in your life? He promises never to turn anyone away who seeks after Him. If you are not sure how to express this to Him, use the prayer below as a guide.

Pursue

OBEY

*Father, thank you
for calling me to
yourself.*

*May I have a holy
passion for you.*

*Help me to pursue
you and to love you
with all of my heart.*

*Teach me to depend
on you and to trust
you in all things.*

*It is my desire that
you become the
most important
person in my life.*

*Like Paul, I want to
know you and the
power of your
resurrection.*

Amen.

Session 1—Pursue

Pursue

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We are to *pursue* God with all of our heart, with all of our mind, and with all of our will. This means that our eyes are always on Him. He is continuously in our focus. We are running toward Him like a runner seeking the prize at the end of a race. Nothing will divert our attention from reaching the prize.

Pursuing The Wrong Thing

The year was 1969. I had been married less than two years. I was what you might call a “car guy.” I had a passion for fast cars. I owned a ‘55 Chevy at the time, but I wanted to get something a little newer. I had been looking at several different models, but there was one in particular that I wanted more than anything else.

Standing in the showroom of a local car dealership I was looking at my dream car. It was beautiful; a new 1969 Corvette, blue with a white rag top, rally wheels, and a 350 cu. in. engine with 350 hp—my heart was pounding! I was drooling like a two-year old kid cutting teeth.

“May I help you?” I was suddenly aware that someone was watching me. “She’s a beauty,” the salesman said—not that he needed to tell me. “Would you like to take a test drive?” He asked. “Are you kidding me?” I thought, trying to keep from running and jumping into the driver’s seat. “Sure, why not?” I said.

I turned the ignition key and immediately those 350 horses roared to life. Out of the parking lot and down the road I went. I was in car heaven. I couldn’t believe I was actually driving the car of my dreams. My mind was racing with thoughts of how I could make my wife understand my overwhelming desire to purchase this automobile. “This is a once in a life-time opportunity,” I reasoned. “Surely she would agree with me.”

I returned to the dealership, more determined than ever to own this car. I called the bank and spoke with a loan officer. “Yes, Mr. Mullins, I believe we can arrange a loan for the automobile you want to purchase.” I thanked him and hung up the phone. “Yes!” I said, feeling both joy and relief. “One down and one to go.”

“Hi, honey,” I said over the phone. “I was driving by the dealership and they just happened to have a special price on one of their cars.” Searching for the right words, I continued. “You know our old ‘55 is needing a lot of work and we could spend more on getting it fixed than it’s really worth. It would be a good time to trade.” Silence. “Honey, are you still there?” I knew that she was; I could feel the tension in the air. “I’ll leave it up to you,” she said, reluctantly. That was her way of telling me that she really didn’t want me to buy this car.

In the end I didn’t buy the 1969 corvette. My passion for it almost caused me to make a decision that I would have later regretted. Just two months after my test ride, I lost my job.

So what’s the point? When we pursue something we think we can’t live without to the point that we don’t think clearly, it will most often lead us to regret the choice we made.

Even though I was a Christian, when I was pursuing the car of my dreams, I didn’t give any thought of talking to God about it. Somehow I knew He wasn’t a “car guy.” Not that He wouldn’t want me to enjoy having a new car, but my pursuit of it had become more important to me than my pursuit of Him.

At the end of the day, what matters most is my intimacy with Him. If He is my priority, He will give me the desires of my heart, including a 1969 Corvette. Okay, maybe. . .

THINKABOUTIT

Maybe you have never wanted a Corvette, but perhaps there's something else you've had your mind set on and you can't seem to live without it. Whatever it may be, in the end it will always take you away from the most important thing, *the 1 thing*—having a passion for God.

The Right Frame Of Mind

To develop a passion for Christ, we must begin the process by renewing our mind. Our affection for Him is developed through our understanding of who He is. Not surprisingly, this comes through the Word of God. It is interesting to note that the Bible says, "The revelation of your words brings light and gives understanding to the inexperienced" (Psa. 119:130). In other words, the Word helps us to understand the character of God, to understand His love for us, to understand His amazing grace and abiding presence. And it guides us to know Him in an intimate and personal way.

Moreover, the Bible says that the "Word of God is living and effective and sharper than any two-edged sword, penetrating as far as to divide soul, spirit, joints, and marrow; it is a judge of the ideas and thoughts of the heart" (Heb. 4:12). As we allow ourselves to be instructed by the Word, it is less likely that we will fall into a pattern of disobedience. This is important—if we desire to develop a real passion for Christ.

Let The Journey Begin

Let's revisit our acronym. The "P" in PASSION is for Pursue. To pursue something means there is a desire to attain it, to possess it. In a positive sense, it is the object of our affection.

It is important to note that we are pursuing intimacy with God. Our desire is to know Him through His Word. However, simply obeying a set of rules or regulations without passion for Him will leave us dry and lifeless.

But passion alone can lead us astray. It can cause us to be misguided and pursue those things that are ungodly. Our pursuit of God must be tempered with a balance of both passion and biblical knowledge. In Romans 10:2, we read these words: "I can testify about them (Israel) that they have zeal (passion) for God but not according to knowledge."

This imbalance caused them to circumvent the righteousness of God and led them to establish their own righteousness. Thus, they substituted their own work-righteousness for God's grace-righteousness. The end result was that they were unable to submit to God because of their lack of understanding, and they forfeited the opportunity to walk by faith in a love relationship with Him.

The prize we seek (eternal life with Christ) will be awarded to us at the end of our life, when our race is run. That is when we will stand in the presence of Christ and bask in the beauty of His holiness. But now, we must pace ourselves to run a marathon so that we will finish the

race before us. The apostle Paul is a great example of this. In 2 Timothy 4:7 he says, "I have fought the good fight, *I have finished the race*, I have kept the faith" (italics added).

In the interim we should spend our time getting to know this great God and Savior who loves us. How do we do this in a practical way? It begins, first of all, by *knowing* that we have a personal relationship with Him through His Son, Jesus Christ. He is received by faith. That is, if you will acknowledge that you are a sinner and believe that Jesus came to die for your sins, that He was raised to life on the third day, and you confess Him as your Lord and Savior, He will change you from the inside out, making you a new creation.

The Bible always gives us the correct information about God so that we can know how much He loves us, what to expect from Him, and what He expects from us.

Second, we set our minds on things above and focus our thoughts on heavenly things. The world we live in is constantly bombarding our minds with ungodly information. Having the right mindset is imperative if we are to win this battle being waged in the mind. Studying the Word will help us discern the difference between what is good and what is evil. The Bible presents us with the correct information about God so that we can comprehend how much He loves us, what we can expect from Him, and what He expects from us.

The Holy Spirit plays an important part in our pursuit of God. Through Him we experience the joy of being loved by God. We know that God hears us when we pray because the Holy Spirit is helping us to speak to Him. We walk with confidence and assurance with God because the Spirit is guiding us to keep in step with Him. When God speaks to us, the Holy Spirit is our interpreter. He helps us to understand the things of God, even the deep things (1 Cor 2:10). He also supplies us with power to carry out the works that God created for us to do. Without His guidance and strength, nothing of eternal significance can be accomplished.

Invest

Nurture

TALK ABOUT IT

Take time to answer the questions below. You may want to share your answers in your small group.

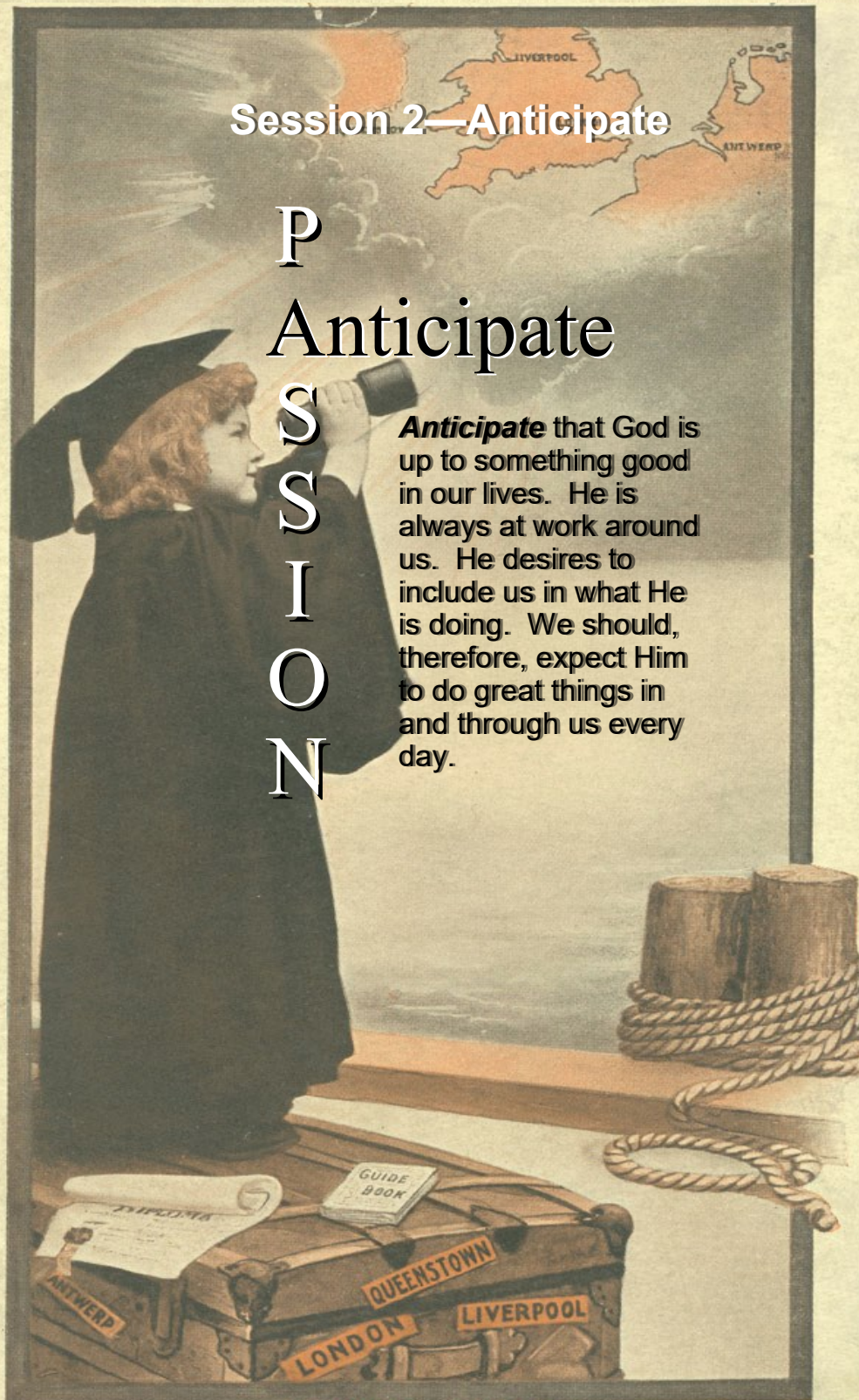
- 1) What is the one thing that is most important to you?
- 2) List the things that have preeminence over your relationship with Christ.
- 3) From your list, how can you re-prioritize your life so that Christ is first?
- 4) Are there some things that need to be taken out of your life? If so, what are they?
- 5) What can you do to strengthen your passion for Christ?
- 6) Explain what it means to have intimacy with Christ.
- 7) What is the role of the Holy Spirit in developing your relationship with Christ?
- 8) In your own words, describe what it means to pursue God.

Session 2—Anticipate

P Anticipate

S S I O N

Anticipate that God is up to something good in our lives. He is always at work around us. He desires to include us in what He is doing. We should, therefore, expect Him to do great things in and through us every day.



Rebecca's Prayer

I was in India, looking forward to meeting Helen and Sundar Singh who lived in Bangalore. They had started bringing street kids into their home who had been abandoned or orphaned. Forty-four boys and one girl were finding hope in what had previously been a hopeless situation.

During my first couple of days with the Singhs, I learned that the children needed Bibles, so my friend Pete and I went to the International Bible Society, located in the city, and bought paperback editions and gave them to the boys.

The only girl, Rebecca, lived apart from the boys and spent most of her time with Helen Singh. Only a few months earlier Helen had led Rebecca to faith in Christ. She came from a small village where she had been abused by her father and other members of her family. Because her family saw little value in her, they cast her out of the home. She showed up one day in front of Helen's residence. Alone and hungry, she begged Helen for food and shelter.

Rebecca had never gone to school. She was raised as a Hindu, but her new-found faith in Christ made her hungry to know more about God. When the Bibles were given to the boys, Helen asked me if I would consider giving one to Rebecca. "Of course," I said. "Why shouldn't she have a Bible?" It was then Helen shared with me that Rebecca could not read or write. Still, I wanted her to have one. I took one of the Bibles and wrote Proverbs 3:5-6 on the inside flap and handed it to her. Her eyes beamed with anticipation and excitement.

A couple of weeks later, after I had returned home, I called Helen to see how the children were doing. She told me that Rebecca had been so excited with her new Bible. She read to Rebecca the Bible passage from Proverbs that I had referenced in her Bible earlier,— "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and He will make your paths straight."

Late one evening Rebecca climbed the stairs and opened a door that led to the roof of the Singh's residence. The large terrace, outlined by a three feet high parapet, became the alter from which the young orphaned girl cried out to her heavenly father. All alone, with the faith and anticipation of a child, she made a simple request. "Father," she said. "I want to be able to read this book." Remaining there throughout the night, she experienced the love and compassion of the Father and the answer to her prayer.

Early the next morning she ran to Helen and exclaimed with joy, "Auntie, I can read!" She quickly began to read passage after passage to Helen. So grateful for all that God had done for her, she immediately began to memorize scripture. By the time I returned to India nearly six months later, she had committed to memory 121 chapters of the Bible.

Rebecca was just sixteen years old when God gave her the ability to read. Not long after that, she returned to visit the small village where she once lived. With Bible in hand, she stood boldly at the center of her village and began to make known to the people this great God who had met her and transformed her life. God's message of love had been implanted deep within her. The little evangelist would not be silent.

THINKABOUTIT

Rebecca's story is the story of anyone who will come before God with childlike faith, look to Him and listen with anticipation. He always responds lovingly and tenderly with words of life. He stands ready to help, and to meet us at our point of need.

Are there areas of your life in which you need God's help?

Like Father, Like Son

Referring back to our acronym, the "A" in PASSION is for anticipate. Anticipation is a keen awareness that God is present and is about to reveal Himself, His purposes, and His ways to us.

When He speaks, it is to make us aware that He is up to something important and that He wants us to be a part of what He is doing. We should anticipate and expect the supernatural power of God to be manifested through our life.

In John 5:19-20 Jesus said, "Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner. For the Father loves the Son, and shows Him all things that He Himself is doing."

Do you see the significance of that statement? Jesus Himself is showing us the importance of having intimacy with the Father. He also reveals to us why the Father desires to include the Son in His work: It is because He loves the Son.

As we come to understand the love of the Father toward us, we, too, can expect Him to show us what He is doing and to include us in His work. Looking again at John 17:5, we learn from Jesus: "My Father is always at His work to this very day and I, too, am working." He is doing what the Father is doing because the Father is speaking intimately to Him about His work. We can anticipate that God will do the same for us.

When you have a real passion for Christ, each day is a wonderful opportunity for you to experience the endless ways God wants to bless you. Expectation fills the air as you anticipate that God is about to do something around you and through you.

Do You Believe?

1 Thessalonians 2:13 states: "We also constantly thank God that when you received the Word of God which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men, but for what it really is, the Word of God, which also performs its work in you who believe." Anticipation and belief are related. The verse states that if I believe the Word, that is, I accept that it is true and that it is "alive and powerful," according to Hebrews 4:12, then I can anticipate that it will work according to God's plan for me. Since God is at work around me and wants me to be included

in what He is doing, I can expect things to happen that can only be attributed to Him. I can also anticipate that people will be drawn to Him as a result of what they see Him doing in my life.

Since God is at work around me and wants me to be included in what He is doing, I can expect things to happen that can only be attributed to Him.

The story of blind Bartimaeus in Mark chapter 10 is a great incidence of God at work. Sitting by the side of the road, Bartimaeus hears that Jesus is passing by. Anticipating that Jesus might help him, Bartimaeus cries out to Him. Although other people nearby were telling him to be quiet, he cried out all the more. When Jesus called to him, Mark records:

“And casting aside his cloak, he jumped up, and came to Jesus.” And answering him, Jesus said, “What do you want Me to do for you?” And the blind man said to Him, “Rabboni, I want to regain my sight!” And Jesus said to him, “Go your way; your faith has made you well.” And immediately he regained his sight and began following Him on the road (vv. 50-53). Luke 18:43 adds, “and when all the people saw it, they gave praise to God.”

Anticipation paved the way for God to work. Bartimaeus heard the Word. Believing that Jesus would help him, he jumped up, threw aside his cloak and came to Jesus. The Word of God performed its work in the believing blind man. The result was that many people praised God for His mighty work.

You are a child of the Most High God. He has chosen you to be His vessel of honor. He created you for eternity. He has gifted you in this life to impact the world around you. He loves you with an everlasting love. He has promised never to leave you. He has given you everything you need to live a godly life. He will not withhold any good thing from you. Knowing these things, should we not anticipate that He will do “exceedingly, abundantly more than we can ask or think?” (Eph. 3:20.)



Invest

Nurture

TALK ABOUT IT

Take time to answer the questions below. You may want to share your answers in your small group.

- 1) Do you anticipate that God will do something in your life when He speaks to you? Explain.
- 2) Do you identify with anything from the life of Bartimaeus? Rebecca? If so, explain.
- 3) Have you experienced answers to prayer that bolstered your faith? If so, would you share them with others in your group?

Session 3—Surrender

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Surrender

Surrender. If we are going to move forward with God, we must come to the point that we are willing to give up all rights to control our life. God has the plan for making our journey with Him complete. As we consent to His will and His ways we begin to experience His supernatural strength at work in us.

You Want Me To Do What?

I stared at the ceiling. We had been in bed for just a short time. "Are you awake?" I asked with some hesitation. "Yes," came the reply from my wife. "I have something to tell you," I said. This was not going to be easy. For some time she had been telling me that I should be more dedicated in my relationship with God, and now I was about to tell her just how dedicated I had become. This would be life-changing for both of us.

We had been fairly regular in our church attendance, but we weren't all that committed to following Christ. It wasn't until the last couple of years that I had started to move closer to Him. My pastor had been instrumental in guiding me in that direction. We had developed a really good friendship, and he had begun a discipleship program with me.

I was reading and studying the Bible with an intensity that surprised even me. I couldn't seem to get enough. One thing was becoming apparent to me: with all that I was learning, I felt a desire to share those things with other people. I enjoyed working with men, so I decided that sharing what I had learned with them would be a good way not only to encourage them in their spiritual walk, but also enable me to deepen my understanding of the Word.

On my day job, I worked as a field engineer for a large construction company. At the time, we were building a new hospital and it was my responsibility to oversee the civil engineering on the site. I had worked a long time to get this position and I really enjoyed the challenges of working on a large project. We were two years into a three year contract when I got "the call."

At first I thought it was my imagination. You know, one of those crazy thoughts that goes through your head and makes you say, "Where did that come from?" But somehow it kept coming back again and again. "This just couldn't be from God," I reasoned. "He wouldn't ask me to quit a great job like this and do something that I was untrained to do, would He?" Apparently He would. After several days of prayer and asking God a lot of questions, I finally concluded that He was in fact calling me to. . .

"Before you answer, I want you to know that I have prayed and I feel sure that God has spoken to me," I said, as my wife turned toward me in the bed. "I believe He is calling me into the ministry, to be a pastor." There it was. I had blurted it out almost without meaning to say it. There was an eerie silence. I waited for her to respond. Then, with hardly any expression, she said, "I don't think so; He hasn't said anything to me about it." That was the end of it. She turned and promptly went to sleep. I didn't bring the subject up with her again. I simply told God that I had undoubtedly not understood what He had said to me, or when He spoke to me, He must have forgotten to tell my wife. However, God was not deterred. A few days after our bedtime conversation, my wife came to me and said, "I believe God is calling you to be a pastor."

One year later I found myself saying goodbye to my co-workers and heading off for my big adventure. There was only one problem: God forgot to tell me just where we were going or what we would be doing. So, I came home and waited.

It was at this point that I began to second guess my decision about leaving my former employer. Several months had now gone by and all my savings and other income were gone. What was God up to? Had I made the right decision? Would my surrender to His call to be a pastor really happen? I wasn't getting any answers from Him.

I couldn't see it, but God was at work. Finally, at the end of December, five months after I left my old job, I became the pastor of a church right in the town I was living in. I later found out that at the very time I resigned from my job in July, the pastor of that same church had also

resigned. Although the church interviewed several other pastors with prior experience and who were seminary trained, they chose me, the only one with neither experience nor formal training.

Needless to say, after several years of pastoring, God has shown me that He is faithful. My willingness to obey His call has opened up many more opportunities for me, including traveling to many countries around the world to share His love.

THINKABOUTIT

When we decide to surrender our will to God's will and to trust Him, He causes the consequences of our decisions to always work for our good. We also have the assurance that He will provide everything we need to carry out His plan for our lives.

Do you trust God enough to surrender your will to His?

The Way To True Freedom

Looking at our acronym, the "S" in PASSION is for Surrender. It means that we consent to the authority of another—in this case, God. Without surrendering to Him, we will never receive all the good things He has in store for us. Surrendering is not a concept that sits well with most of us, however. Everything in us rebels at the idea of someone else controlling our lives. This is the consequence of a fallen nature.

Satan is the author of rebellion, which is the opposite of surrender. It is his obsession that no one becomes submissive to God. Being the "father of lies," he is constantly trying to get us to believe that if we surrender to the will of God, we will lose our freedom. In fact, just the opposite is true. It is when we come under the lordship of Christ that we find true freedom and liberty.

The Cross—The True Picture Of Surrender

The cross of Christ, in my opinion, is the greatest symbol of surrender. Christ was willing to die on it in order to give eternal life to those who would put their trust in Him. Paul also used it figuratively in Galatians 2:20 to show us what the surrendered life looks like. "I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." In Romans 6:6, Paul again shows us that every believer has been crucified with Christ. The implication is that the "body of sin," our flesh, can no longer enslave us and we can walk in freedom without sin's bondage. But one of the most important things to understand is that our surrender to the lordship of Christ brings us incredible strength. It is in our weakness—our decision not to exert our self will—that we find Christ's power at work in us. In 2 Corinthians 12:9 the Word of God states, "for my power is made perfect in weakness." Do you see it? It is in our weakness and our total dependence on Christ that His power is manifested in and through us.

Dead Man Walking

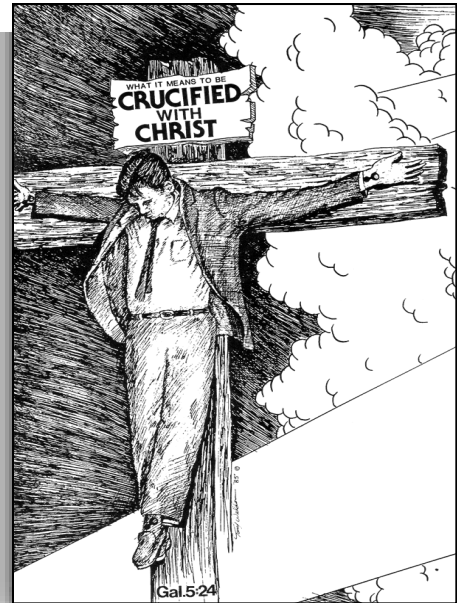
In Romans 6:11 we are admonished to “reckon or count ourselves dead to sin.” We can do this because we have been set free from its power through the cross of Christ. His death and resurrection have made this possible. But just as important is the fact that we are also to reckon or count ourselves “alive to God in Christ Jesus.”

Dead to sin—alive to God. This is the truth that sets us free. Knowing this enables us to surrender to Him without fear. We know that He loves us by the fact that He gave His Son to die for us. In addition, the Word says, “He who did not spare his own Son, but gave him up for us all—how will he not also along with him, graciously give us all things.”

So do you think it makes any sense not to surrender to the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving God who promises only to give us His best? How you answer will determine your destiny.

“I surrender all,” might be the most important words you ever say to God. Think about it.

Dead to sin—alive to God. This is the truth that sets us free.



Anticipate _____ Surrender

Invest

Nurture

TALK ABOUT IT

Take time to answer the questions below. You may want to share your answers in your small group.

1) What are the consequences of surrendering to Christ?

Surround

2) Do you believe God has called you for a specific purpose?
Have you surrendered your will to His?

3) How does surrendering your will to God bring power into your life?

Surrender

Invest

4) How do you count yourself dead to sin? Alive to God?

Nurture

Session 4—Surround

*Iron
sharpens
iron,
so a man
sharpens
the
countenance
of his
Friend
Prov 27:17*

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We should *surround* ourselves with others who have the same desires. Being with other people of like mind is important. “Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another” (Prov. 27:17). These relationships help to build us up in our faith.

Jimbo's Story

"Do you know what it means to have a relationship with Christ?" I asked the young man on the other side of the thick glass window that separated us. He was incarcerated for a number of crimes, including stealing and using drugs. "I thought I knew," he said. "But now I'm not so sure. This orange suit I'm wearing and the fact that I'm locked up sure doesn't indicate that I know."

I began to share with him what a real relationship with Christ meant. For several weeks we talked, and on one of my visits he said he was ready to commit his life to Jesus. I led him in a prayer and he repeated it with a sincere heart.

Several months passed and I could see the change that Christ had brought into his life. While James "Jimbo" Parks served his time, he made the decision to surround himself with other inmates who were living out their faith in Christ. Night after night he attended Bible studies with other inmates who were believers. Not long after this, he had the opportunity to be released from jail and enroll in a program called Drug Court. He would be allowed to attend classes during the day and then return home at night. He would be on home confinement and also under close supervision. The only requirement—a place to live upon his release.

His mother had died before he was sent to jail, and his father lived out of state. His other relatives would not accept him because some of his crimes were against the family.

He shared his dilemma with his friend Jeff, my son, hoping that he could help. After some discussion, the decision was made to allow Jimbo to live at our Heaven Sent Ministries headquarters building so he could enroll in the Drug Court program.

Once he arrived at HSM, he was surrounded by staff members who showed him the love of Christ. He began a discipleship program to help him mature in his faith. After more than a year of living at the HSM headquarters, we decided to invite Jimbo to be a part of our full-time staff. God has brought him full circle as he now reaches out to others who struggle with the same issues he was able to overcome by the power of the gospel and the love of Christ.

No man is an island. This is particularly true when it comes to living the Christian life. God has designed us to be a part of His body, the church. Without the support and encouragement of other believers, we will be an easy target for the enemy. Being with other people of like mind is important. Proverbs 27:17 states, "Iron sharpens iron, and one man sharpens another."

THINKABOUTIT

The Bible says, "As a man thinks in his heart, so he is." (Prov. 23:7) In other words, what we think about is what we become. What we become is partially the result of who we surround ourselves with. Think about who has the most influence on your life. Remember, "no one can serve two masters, since either he will hate one and love the other, or be devoted to one and despise the other" (Mt. 6:24).

Who is influencing your life? Are they leading you closer to Christ?

OBEY

d

A Smart Beginning

Solomon was the son of King David and Bathsheba. He became the king of Israel after the death of his father. Solomon's kingdom was unique in that God blessed him with great wisdom. In 1 Kings 3:6-14, God appears to Solomon during the night in a dream and tells him to ask for whatever he wants God to give him:

"You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. "Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both riches and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. And if you walk in my ways and obey my statutes and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life."



Bad Judgment

God chose to bless Solomon in a very special way. This blessing, however, was contingent upon Solomon walking in the ways of God and obeying His statutes. But even though Solomon was wise, he was unable to refrain from falling into sin. What started out in greatness ended up in shame. Solomon's spiral downward was the result of not forsaking those things that took his heart away from God.

Too Much Of A Bad Thing

King Solomon, however, loved many foreign women besides Pharaoh's daughter—Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians and Hittites. . . As Solomon grew old, his wives turned his heart after other gods, and his heart was not fully devoted to the LORD his God, as the heart of David his father had been. He followed Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and Molech the detestable god of the Ammonites. So Solomon did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not follow the LORD completely, as David his father had done. . . The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD's command. So the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to one of your subordinates. Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen" (1 Kgs 11:1, 4, 9-13).

A Thousand To One

Although God had given Solomon great wisdom, he made the wrong choice of surrounding himself with foreign wives. Seven hundred to be exact, plus three hundred concubines. The odds were a thousand to one in favor of failure. Even the smartest man alive was no match for their ungodly cunning. Their influence over him eventually led him to disobey God. This led to a pattern of disobedience. Therefore, God raised up adversaries against Solomon, resulting in a kingdom divided and a nation under the judgment of God.

Decisions, Decisions

Our enemy, the devil, is an opportunist. When we make decisions that are opposed to God's directives, he will take advantage of those bad decisions and cause us to lose valuable ground in our spiritual walk with Christ. We need the influence of Godly people to encourage us to make the right decisions. Surrounding ourselves with people of like mind will keep us from being drawn away from what God has planned for us.

We are to "seek what is above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set [our] minds on what is above, not on what is on the earth" (Col. 3:1, 2). God said to Solomon that He would give him a wise, discerning heart and long life if he would obey His commands. Surely God will do this for us if we are faithful to walk in obedience to Him and give Him preeminence in our lives.

TALKABOUTIT

Take time to answer the questions below. You may want to share your answers in your small group.

1) What were God's promises to Solomon in 1 Kings chapter 3?

2) What caused Solomon to turn from God?

3) What impact did evil influences have on Solomon's kingdom?

4) What can you do to keep evil influences from turning your heart away from God?

5) How does the devil take advantage of you when you make wrong decisions?

Session 5—Invest

P A S S I O N

Invest

What better way to instill passion for Christ than to *invest* our lives in the lives of others. Paul said it this way: “In humility consider others as more important than yourselves. Everyone should look out not [only] for his own interests, but also for the interests of others” (Phil. 2:3, 4).

A Man Called Peder

We met soon after I became the pastor of Fellowship Baptist Church. He was somewhat reserved at first, but it wasn't long before Pete and I became good friends. Pete and Susan Espeseth had recently moved from Montana to West Virginia where Susan had taken a position as the medical director of a local rehab hospital. Pete had taught in a Christian school in Montana but was now ready to become a farmer.

Pete was sure that God had guided Susan and him to West Virginia. They had spent a lot of time praying before leaving the Midwest. He felt strongly that God's plan included more than Susan's job at the rehab and him working the farm they had purchased.

Pete's passion for Christ was evident in the way he lived his life. He had developed a special relationship with his former pastor in Montana. He was both a sounding board and an encourager to the man of God. This was a role that he would continue with me when he joined Fellowship Baptist Church.

Early on in our relationship, Pete and I developed a strong desire to do mission work. Just a couple of years into our relationship, we felt called to start Heaven Sent Ministries (HSM). It was at this point that we began to travel to other countries.

During our ten years of ministry together at Fellowship, we were able to see God do tremendous things. As a result of our investment in those early days, HSM grew into a multi-faceted organization and now carries out ministry in more than twenty countries throughout the world.

Pete also invested in the lives of young people. Many of them were the recipients of his generosity, as he supported them financially to go on short-term mission trips. But most of all, he was a close friend and confidant to me. He prayed for me daily.

Throughout our friendship of eighteen years, we experienced things that few men will experience in a lifetime. Sadly, our time together was cut short in September of 2009 when he succumbed to cancer.

During the last months of his life, Pete demonstrated tremendous faith. All those who knew him, whether long-time friends or brief acquaintances, were given a beautiful picture of a man in love with God. He never waivered, never complained, always loved. The investments he made in the kingdom of God will have eternal consequences.

God's Word says that our life is like a vapor—compared to eternity. We are here for only a short period of time. Therefore, we should make the most of the opportunities that God presents to us. This is how Peder Espeseth lived his life.

THINKABOUTIT

A wise person will invest his time in things that have eternal value. Our staff at HSM, spending long hours doing ministry projects, will tell you that they consider their time an investment in the kingdom of God. This investment not only brings dividends now, but the ultimate dividend will also be paid when we reach our eternal destination.

What talent or gift has God given to you? Are you using it to glorify Him? Now is the time to invest.

OBEY

nd

Investing Wisely

God is all about investing. He has designed our lives so that when we enter into a relationship with Him, a heavenly bank account is opened and we begin to make deposits into it.

Paul gives us an overview of how this works in Philippians 4. He commends the church for being concerned about his welfare, even though he says that he has no needs. He says, "I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need" (vv 11, 12). He goes on to say that he "can do all things through Him who strengthens me" (v 13).

Paul uses this opportunity, however, to impart a spiritual truth to the Philippians. He conveys to the church that he doesn't need their help as much as they need the opportunity to invest. He says that he is not seeking the gift itself but he seeks "for the profit which increases to [their] account" (v 16).

The principle is this: As they help him, their investment is being recorded in heaven. That is, it is being put into their heavenly account, so that whenever they have need of something, God says that he will "supply all [their] needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (v 19).

Being Rich Toward God

In Luke 12, God reminds us of the importance of being rich toward Him. This principle is couched in the parable of a rich man who had land that had become very productive. We pick up the story in verse 17.

And he began reasoning to himself, saying, 'What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?' And he said, 'This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 'And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry. But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?' So is the man who lays up



treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.

How do we become rich toward God? I believe the answer is found in Jesus' response to the lawyer in Matthew 22:36-39 who asked the question:

Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law? And He said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.

Being rich toward God is found by loving God and serving others. It is found as we develop our spiritual gifts and become mature in our faith. It is found as we look for opportunities to be involved with God in His work. Being rich toward God is ultimately about having a passion for Him and what He is doing in the world around us.

It Is Better To Give Than To Receive

Luke 6:38 says, "Give and it will be given to you; good measure, pressed down, shaken together, running over, [men] will pour into your lap. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return."

Investing in God's kingdom is much different than investing in the world's economy. In order to reap the benefits of investing in this life, we must always be looking for ways to make sure our investments are secure. However, there is always the possibility that we could lose part or all of that which we have worked so hard for if our investments take a downturn.

Investments in the kingdom of God are eternal. When we are generous in our giving, He guarantees that we will always receive much more than we give. Paul expressed this truth in 2 Corinthians 9:8,10:

"And God is able to make all grace (every favor and earthly blessing) come to you in abundance, so that you may always and under all circumstances and whatever the need be self-sufficient (possessing enough to require no aid or support and furnished in abundance for every good work and charitable donation). And [God] Who provides seed for the sower and bread for eating will also provide and multiply your (resources for) sowing and increase the fruits of your righteousness (which manifest itself in active goodness, kindness, and charity) (Amplified Bible).

Being rich toward God is found by loving God and serving others.

TALKABOUTIT

Take time to answer the questions below. You may want to share your answers in your small group.

1) What is a wise investment?

2) How is giving a heavenly investment?

3) How do we become rich toward God?

4) What conditions need to be met for God to supply all of our needs?

5) Why is it important for us to be generous in our giving?

A person wearing a white and yellow robe stands on a wooden platform, holding two large, glowing, golden spheres. The background shows a sunset over a mountain range. In the foreground, there are several gift boxes, including a prominent red one with a blue ribbon.

Session 6—Obey

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Obey. When God speaks, we are to respond with a resounding “Yes!” This is how we show our love for Him. Our willingness to be led by His Spirit will open many doors of opportunity for us. God is able to use our spiritual gifts and talents to advance His kingdom.

Obey
N

Shaken, Then Stirred

I slumped into my chair in the den, aimed the remote toward the television, hit the on button, and began listening to the news. It was late. I had just returned from the office after a long day. I was prepared to hear the same rhetoric of what was going on in Iraq, Iran—or some other hot spot around the world—or listen to the pundits spin the latest political news coming out of Washington.

But I was hearing breaking news. The small country of Haiti had just experienced an earthquake of sufficient magnitude to nearly destroy the city of Port Au Prince. As news reports continued to come in, it became apparent that the people of Haiti were going to need tremendous help as soon as it could be mobilized.

Within the next few hours, the world community began to respond by offering to send help to these hurting people. As I watched, I couldn't help thinking how much they would need food. I knew our resources were already stretched, so I dismissed the idea of trying to send any of the food packets to Haiti that we ship to needy people in other countries. This, I reasoned, was a job for the "big boys." Although it bothered me not to help, I went to bed that night unsettled, but facing the reality that HSM couldn't get involved in this plight.

I woke up early, still thinking of the earthquake in Haiti. I dressed and headed to the office. On the way, I felt an uneasiness in my spirit. Once again I reasoned that our ministry could not help. As I arrived at the office, I called a staff meeting. Haiti was on everyone's mind. We began talking about the situation, and the question came up as to whether we could help with food. It was at this point that we decided to pray for the situation in Haiti. As each person prayed, there was a sense that God was speaking to us. By the time we finished praying, it was clear that He wanted HSM to participate by sending aid immediately.

The questions continued to flow. "How could we get food into Haiti?" "Where would we get the money for food ingredients?" "How would we pay for shipping?" "Who would be our contact in Haiti?" It all seemed almost impossible, and yet we knew we had to obey the call to help.

That was it—we would obey God and leave the consequences to Him. He had all the resources. He only needed our obedience and willingness to follow Him. It was at this point that things really began to happen.

Before we knew it, we were packaging food nonstop. All the things we needed began to fall into place. Volunteers came to put together our food packets; people donated money to purchase ingredients. We connected with several key groups to get the food shipped into Haiti. This was truly a "God encounter."

Our initial goal was to send a 20' container to Haiti, but God had bigger plans. Instead of a 20' container, we were able to ship a 40' container with food left over to begin filling a second container.

After several weeks of working to get food into Haiti, we had numerous opportunities to expand our work with several organizations. Only God knows how all of these connections will eventually shake out. One thing is certain: Our obedience in doing this one thing opened many opportunities for further ministry, not only in Haiti but around the world. To God be the glory!

THINKABOUTIT

Our own reasoning can lead us to false conclusions when it comes to following God. Unless we are willing to listen to the prompting of the Holy Spirit and obey what He says, we will find ourselves standing in opposition to God. This can cause us to lose the opportunities for blessings that God has in store for us.

What is God saying to you? Are you willing to obey Him completely? This will be the determining factor for future blessing.

OBEY

To Obey Or Not To Obey? - That Is The Question

Saul was Israel's first king. He came from the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest of all the tribes of Israel. He was chosen by God to rule over His people. In the beginning Saul walked in the anointing of God. It would not be long, however, before he began to walk in disobedience. Saul's rebellion signaled that he had turned his heart away from God. This became a pattern, and in the end it caused him to lose his kingdom.

1 Samuel 15 reports Saul's encounter with the prophet Samuel after he was instructed to destroy the Amalekites. When confronted with his unwillingness to do what the prophet Samuel had directed him to do, Saul justified himself rather than repent. This was the final act of disobedience that ended Saul's rule over Israel. Saul was confronted with the stark truth that God is not satisfied with anything other than complete obedience.

Saul's disobedience signaled that he had turned his heart away from God.

Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, "Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal." When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions." But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?" Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest." "Stop!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night." "Tell me," Saul replied. Samuel said, "Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out.' Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?" "But I



did obey the LORD," Saul said. "I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal." But Samuel replied: "Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifice as much as in obeying the voice of the LORD? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams (vv 12-22).

Which Way Is Right?

When a man takes control of his own life, he is subject to the influence of satanic powers. Satan will lead him to think that the decisions he makes apart from God will not have a negative impact on his life. Gradually, subtly, Satan will lead him away from the wisdom of God and God's Word. Unless there is repentance—a turning back to God—the consequence will be spiritual death, which could even lead to physical death. "There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death" (Prov. 14:12).

This is, in fact, what we see played out in the life of King Saul; a tragic end to what could have been a great time of leadership for the people of Israel. Saul had been given everything he needed to succeed as king. However, he chose to live independent of God. This is a problem even for God's people today. We can choose to do things our way or God's way. The choices we make will have eternal consequences. When we live our lives independent of God, we will not be able to discern His voice as He tries to direct us in the way we should go. If we listen to the voice of God, however, and respond in obedience to what He says, He promises to lead us in the good way.

Listen to the words of David in Psalm 32:8. "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with my eye." The implication is that God is ready to personally guide us and direct our path and to show us what is on his mind and heart. Again in Proverbs 3:5-6 we are encouraged to put our trust in God. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths." This is the promise of God's Word to those who set their hearts on Him. This is the good way. The way of blessing.

Invest

Nurture

TALK ABOUT IT

Take time to answer the questions below. You may want to share your answers in your small group.

- 1) Why is it important to obey God completely?
- 2) Is God satisfied with partial obedience?
Why or why not?
- 3) What happens when a person chooses to disobey God?
- 4) How do you know if your heart is turned away from God?

A pair of hands is shown from the front, cupping a small, vibrant green tree with dark soil. The tree has a thick, gnarled trunk and dense, needle-like foliage. The hands are positioned as if carefully supporting the plant. The background is dark and out of focus.

Session 7—Nurture

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We will grow in our relationship with Christ if we will constantly *nurture* our spiritual life. How do we do this? Be consistent in reading, studying, and applying the Word to our life.

Nurture

One Of The Four

“Hello, my name is Roger Murray,” said the man standing in the doorway of my house. “I’m the new pastor of the church you attend. May I come in and visit with you for a little while?” he asked. “Yeah, sure,” I said reluctantly. He didn’t waste any time getting to the point of his visit. It seemed, according to him, that God had brought him to this church to help heal the wounds that were still evident from the recent problems that caused the former pastor to resign.

“Before I came to Princeton, I prayed and asked God to give me four men who could become leaders and who would help with the growth of the church,” he said. Then he said something that shocked me. “I believe you are one of those men.” I was shocked because I had not been in church for several weeks, and I was not acting very spiritual, nor was I ready to return.

With as much grace as I could muster, I answered rather emphatically, “I don’t believe I am one of your four men.” That did not seem to deter him. He simply asked me to pray about it and said he hoped to see me in church on Sunday.

It took some time for me to return to church. And then I went mostly to see what kind of preacher Reverend Roger Murray might be. As it turned out, he was quite the teacher. I was struck by his grasp of the Word of God. He was also what I would call a “word smith.” He liked to break down words and get to their root meaning. It wasn’t long before he won me over. It wasn’t long before I became one of his four men.

Pastor Murray had the gift of discipling men. He spent time showing the four of us how to study the Word. Before long, I was spending a lot of time with him, learning how to study effectively. He was constantly handing me a book to read. I resisted at first because reading didn’t appeal to me. After some time, however, I began to enjoy it. For the next five years he helped me to develop a love for God’s Word. This spurred me on to read other books, and eventually I became an avid reader.

This was a time of nurturing for the four of us. When the time came for Pastor Murray to leave, he left, among other things, the legacy of four men who grew and matured in their faith. His investment in our lives led all of us to surrender to the call of the ministry. As one of the “four,” I now find myself discipling other men and helping to nurture them as they seek to follow God.

THINKABOUTIT

It is important for us to see the value of growing in our relationship with Christ. We must take the responsibility to nurture our spiritual life. Nurturing involves reading and studying the Word, imitating those who demonstrate Christ-likeness, and being willing to submit ourselves to those who can teach us how to live righteously.

Written By: Lyle Mullins

The Pilgrim's Progress

We are admonished in 2 Peter 3:18 to “grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” How is that done effectively? Paul gives us insight in Phil 4:9. “The things you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, practice these things.” Paul also says to “continue in the things you have learned and been convinced of” (2 Tim 3:14). The word “continue” used in the text carries with it the idea of making progress. Terms like “fight the good fight,” “lay hold of,” “pursue,” and “guard,” are also used to remind us that we must be actively engaged in our progress toward spiritual maturity.

In 2 Peter 1:3-4 we see that “His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, in order that by them you might become partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust.” So we see that God has made provision for us to have everything we need to develop our spiritual life. He goes on to say, “now for this very reason also, applying all diligence in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge; and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness; and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love” (vv 5-7).

God has made provision for us to have everything we need to develop our spiritual life.

Although God has given us everything we need, we are to supply or add to our faith the character qualities listed above. This is our responsibility. This is how we nurture our spiritual man. Failure to add these things will have a negative impact on our spiritual growth. Again notice the effect of neglecting to add to our faith. “For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having forgotten his purification from his former sins” (v 9). In other words, we begin to regress spiritually. We lose the capacity to think correctly about our situation. As spiritual blindness sets in, our hearts become darkened. This can eventually lead us to doubt our relationship with God.

But diligence in the things of God will prevent us from losing our way. “Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble” (v 10). Diligence carries the idea of loving earnestly. In other words, we steadfastly seek to walk in a manner that characterizes the life of Christ in us.

The Power To Be Free

The Word of God is our most important source of spiritual food. We are to desire it. We are to read it, study it, meditate on it, and obey it. Constant use of the Word trains us to distinguish good from evil (Heb 5:14). This is one of the ways we learn to relate to God. The more we know the Word and obey it, the more we will come to understand who we are in Christ. Jesus said, “If you continue in my word, you really are my disciples. You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32). It seems, according to His words that freedom comes by “continuing” in the Word. In other words, obeying what you know. Knowledge plus obedience

leads to freedom. The more you apply the truth, it is less likely that you will be affected by dark and confusing thoughts. The Holy Spirit empowers you to bring every thought captive to obey Christ. Thus preventing the fiery darts of Satan from becoming strongholds.

The power to grow in our knowledge of God comes from the Holy Spirit living in us. Our growth, however, depends on our willingness to allow Him to have His way in our lives. We can grieve Him and quench His power if we are unwilling to obey His directives. Our flesh rebels against the direction that the Spirit is leading us. Although we are a new creation, we still have the same mind (brain) that we had before we came to Christ. We still have old memories, old appetites and thoughts that can cause strong feelings of our past to rise up in us. This is what Satan uses to stir up the flesh and make us desire to return to our former ways.

We are encouraged to “let the word of Christ dwell in [us] richly as [we] teach and admonish one another with all wisdom” (Col 3:16 NIV). The word “dwell” means that the Word is at home in us. In other words, we know how to correctly handle it (2 Tim 2:15). God's Word is a fountain that never runs dry. Responding to its truth will deepen your understanding of the greatness of God and His amazing love for you.

Anticipate

Surrender

Invest

Nurture

TALKABOUTIT

Take time to answer the questions below. You may want to share your answers in your small group.

1) What are some things that help you grow in your relationship with Christ?

2) What is the source of our spiritual food?
How is it obtained?

3) How do you add to your faith?

4) How do we renew our minds?

5) What does it mean to “know the truth?”

Pursue **THE BOTTOMLINE** OBEY

The Holy Spirit is our teacher. Through Him, we learn that God has chosen us and equipped us for His purpose. Central to that purpose is that we be conformed to the image of Christ. The new life we have in Christ is a new quality of life, no longer dedicated to sin but to the glory of God.

In addition, we are also to make disciples. Our role, according to Matthew 28:19 is to “go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you.” Furthermore, the apostle Paul admonishes us to share “what [we] have heard” [and] “commit to faithful men who will be able to teach others also” (2 Tim 2:2).

Anti **Surrender**

It **DISCIPLESHIP**



*Father, You are worthy
of my praise. Thank
You for loving me with
your everlasting love.*

*Thank You for including
me in your great work of
bringing men to Christ.*

*May I truly become your
obedient disciple, willing
to follow You to the ends
of the earth.*

*And Father, help me to
finish well, to keep the
faith.*

*I look forward to that day
when I will see You and I
will be with You forever.*

Amen.

What is **The 1 Thing** that has preeminence in your life right now? What are you *passionate* about? I believe God is looking for people who have a passion for *Him*. He wants to express Himself through the lives of those who are willing to yield themselves to Him. As we do, we can expect Him to release His mighty power and His incredible love into our lives. Why? Because He wants to touch the world with His message of love and hope. And we are the vessels He uses to accomplish this great work.

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