

# Seeking God



Discovering God's Word

Bible Study Series

# Seeking God

Learn about the importance of seeking God during your life and how you can seek Him

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## *Discovering God's Word Bible Study Series*

**Study Number:** DGW101

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**About the author:** My name is Eric Krieg. I am a disciple of Jesus, a Bible student, a truth seeker, and an evangelist. My interest is in using the Bible as my only guide in my faith. My desire is to help others understand the message of the Bible and pursue true, New Testament Christianity.

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**My plea:** It is my hope and prayer that you are searching for the truth that is contained in God's word, the Bible. My desire is to help you understand and obey these truths God has revealed in the pages of His word. It is to that end that I write this material. Please observe all of the Scripture references and evaluate whether the conclusions I have drawn are in harmony with God's word. If they are, I ask that you make honest application of those truths to your life and obey God's instructions.

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# Seeking God

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# Lesson 1:

## The God We Should Seek

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Seeking God is central to living a life that is pleasing to God. As Hebrews 11:6 states, it is an impossibility to please God without faith. And, this passage identifies two aspects of faith necessary in order for it to please God. First, we must believe that God is (that He exists). Second, we must believe that He will reward those who diligently seek Him. Now, on this second point, recognize that if we are going to believe that there is a reward for those who will seek God, we must then do whatever is involved in seeking after God. For, the concept of seeking God implies that we have not entirely drawn near to Him and received all of the blessings He has promised to those who seek Him.

Sadly, as God looks upon the world, consider what He sees. Psalm 14:1-3 says, “The fool has said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’ They are corrupt, They have done abominable works, There is none who does good. The Lord looks down from heaven upon the children of men, To see if there are any who understand, who seek God. They have all turned aside, They have together become corrupt; There is none who does good, No, not one.”

God does not see anyone who has perfectly sought after Him during the course of their lives. He sees that everyone has turned aside from seeking Him in order to pursue their own selfish endeavors at

some point. Yet, God is searching for those who will seek after Him – and will reward those who do.

So, this all introduces a number of questions as we consider the subject of seeking God. Who is this God we should be seeking after? Why should we seek after Him? What does it mean to seek after Him? How do you seek Him? These are some of the fundamental questions we will be investigating during the course of this eight-lesson study that strives to encourage us to seek God.

This first lesson aims to identify the God we should be seeking in our lives. For, if we do not know whether there is a God or who He is, we will not have the desire to seek Him. And, as we prepare to learn about the God we should seek, perhaps there is no better Bible text to consider than Acts 17:16-34. This passage describes Paul while he was in the city of Athens (Greece). This was a place that was known at that time for great learning and wisdom (from a human standpoint). Yet, it was a city that was full of idols. Verse 16 says that the city was “given over to idols.”

So, whenever the apostle Paul visited this city and saw that there were people who were “very religious” (verse 22) in seeking after these idols, Paul began trying to reason with them about the gods they were seeking. And, among all of the idols that were in the city, there was one that stood out to Paul. He told the people of Athens, “I perceive that in all things you are very religious; for as I was passing through and considering the objects of your worship, I even found an altar with this inscription: TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Therefore, the One whom you worship without knowing, Him I proclaim to you” (verses 22-23).

Here was this “UNKNOWN GOD” they were worshiping – just in case they had missed a god among all of their other idols. Yet, Paul recognized that there truly was a God they did not know – the one true and living God. And, Paul introduces the people of Athens to this UNKNOWN GOD in Acts 17:24-31. Similarly, there are many people today who do not really know the God they should be seeking. So, let’s consider this passage in Acts as a basis for helping us all get to know the “UNKNOWN GOD.” For, it is not possible to truly seek a God we do not know.

# He Is Lord Of Heaven And Earth (Acts 17:24a)

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This “UNKNOWN GOD” is truly different from any of the gods the Athenians had learned about. In fact, as we study this passage in Acts 17, recognize how Paul is describing a God who was much greater than all of their gods combined! In verse 24, he begins to identify this God, saying, “God, who made the world and everything in it, since He is Lord of heaven and earth...” Therefore, let us all be introduced to the God who created the world and is Master of all.

## *He is the Almighty Creator*

Remember back to Hebrews 11:6. In order to please this God, we must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. So, although most of this study will be focused on the latter part of this verse (seeking God), we must begin with believing that God exists. Obviously, we will not seek God unless we are first absolutely convinced that God exists.

Listen to how Paul began identifying God to those who were confused about religion in Acts 17. They believed in a system of many different gods. Now, Paul was introducing them to the one true and living God. And, in order to do so, he directed their minds to consider the origin of the world they were living in and everything they could observe around them.

In the same way, you must seriously consider the origin of the world you are living in and everything that is around you. Ultimately, there is only a very small set of answers to this very large question. Either everything has evolved and came into being by itself, a plurality of gods all contributed to the creation and order that is in the world, or there is a single and All-Powerful God who is the cause of it all.

Those who lived in Athens primarily seemed to believe that there were multiple gods behind the creation of the world. However, you *must* decide how you will choose to believe all of this world and the universe came into being. Popular belief today is to claim that a massive explosion (i.e. the “Big Bang”) gave this universe its start. Then, it is claimed that evolution took over from that point. Now,

according to these theories, we are experiencing the result of billions and billions of years of these kinds of phenomena. Yet, if this is the basis of how you explain the origin of the universe, you must consider a few major questions.

First, where did it all come from? Science has still never explained the actual origin of it all. Though some scientists claim that it all began with an explosion with one particle or a collision between two particles, they still have not explained how those particles have come into existence. Recognize a basic **law** of science. The first law of thermodynamics states that matter and energy cannot be created or destroyed. So, the obvious question is: How can something come from nothing? How could one or two small particles get their origins from absolutely nothing? This scientific law means they could not! Recognize then, that scientific **theories** (i.e. the “Big Bang Theory” – which cannot be proven by science) should not be more trusted than the scientific **laws** (i.e. the first law of thermodynamics – which can be proven by science). This world simply did not originate from nothing!

Second, how did so much order happen by chance? Even if we would ignore the fact that it is contrary to science for something to come from nothing and choose to believe that an explosion or collision of some tiny particle(s) began this world, there is still a problem. The problem is the need to explain how all the beauty, splendor, and order that can be observed in every aspect of this universe happened accidentally. How did order result from chaos (i.e. an explosion or a collision)? Imagine if there was an explosion in a factory that makes watches. Do you suppose that this explosion could cause all of the watch parts and pieces in the factory to come together perfectly to make working watches? If not, why not? How is it possible to then believe that a random explosion or collision of gases or particles traveling in the expanse of space could ever result in the world and universe you can observe around you?

Third, how did one species evolve into an entirely new species? Again, even if we ignore these problems with the explanations that are offered for the origin of the universe, what about the problems involved with evolution. Particularly, the issue of how entirely new species of plants and animals could evolve from separate species? Think about it. Science has never observed one species evolving into

an entirely different kind. Yes, there are evolutionary processes at work in this world. For instance, new breeds of dogs have been developed for various purposes. But, there has never been a frog that evolved into a dog (i.e. into an entirely different kind of species). Yet, that is the basis of the evolution many scientists speak of when they try to explain the origin of the world and everything we see around us. However, do you suppose that if you lived for millions of years that you would ever witness a worm become bird? Or, a cow become a monkey? Or, any other kind of movement across the lines of species/kind?

You see, no matter how anyone ever tries to explain the origins of this world, what we are able to observe in the world and universe that is around us will always be the greatest evidence for the existence of an All-Powerful God who created it all! Listen to Romans 1:19-22. Paul wrote that “what may be known of God is manifest in them, for God has shown it to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse, because, although they knew God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful, but became futile in their thoughts, and their foolish hearts were darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools.”

It is through His creation (the universe, the world, and everything in them) that God provides us with all of the evidence we need to recognize that He is God and that He possesses limitless power. To ignore this truth makes you a fool. Remember, Psalm 14:1 said that it is the “fool” who says in his heart, “There is no God.” The reason this individual is called a “fool” is because he/she chooses to reject the obvious in order to listen to man’s own ideas that are entirely inconsistent with what is observable! So, look around and observe the beauty, splendor, and order in everything that you see and recognize that these things could not have happened accidentally or by chance. The only reasonable explanation is that there is an All-Powerful God who created it all!

### ***He is Master of all***

Then, since we can know that there is an All-Powerful God who created this world and everything in it, we can also understand that this makes Him “Lord of heaven and earth.” The Creator is,

therefore, the Master. Since He is the only one who possesses limitless power, He is only one with the right to control all things. And, He has demonstrated that He is Lord of heaven and earth on many occasions throughout the history of this world – even doing things that mankind would not believe to be possible.

For instance, consider the following Biblical examples. (1) It was God who was able to bring the flood waters upon the earth to destroy the evil that then existed in the world (Genesis 6-8). (2) It was God who brought the plagues upon the Egyptians (Exodus 7-12). He was able to turn water to blood; bring frogs, lice, and flies upon the land of Egypt; cause the death of cattle; cause boils to appear on the Egyptians; cause hail, locusts, and darkness to come upon the land of Egypt; and, cause all the firstborn of the Egyptians to die. (3) It was God who parted the Red Sea so that the Israelites could cross on dry ground (Exodus 14). (4) It was God who caused the earth to open up and swallow Korah and those who rebelled against God with him (Numbers 16). (5) It was God who was able to make the sun stand still for about an entire day while Israel was in battle (Joshua 10). (6) It was God who caused the sun dial to go back ten degrees as proof that He was going to extend King Hezekiah’s life (Isaiah 38). And, it was God who was able to extend this man’s life. (7) It was God who caused King Nebuchadnezzar (king of Babylon) to dwell among the beasts of the field and to eat grass like oxen (Daniel 4). (8) It was God who spared Daniel’s life when he was put into the den of lions (Daniel 6). (9) It was God who caused the great fish to swallow Jonah, preserve Jonah’s life while he was in the belly of the great fish, and release Jonah at the appointed time (Jonah 1-2). (10) It was Jesus Christ (who was God manifested in the flesh) who commanded the winds and the waves to cease (Matthew 8) and who walked on the water (Matthew 14). And, (11) It was God who caused King Herod to be eaten by worms and die (Acts 12).

While other examples could certainly be provided (even from our own observance of God’s world), these certainly demonstrate that God is Master (Lord) of heaven and earth. He is the one with full authority to control the things that happen. And, whenever He chooses to exercise that authority, there is nothing and no one who can withstand the will of this God!

# He Cannot Be Contained In Any Temple (Acts 17:24b)

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As Paul continued helping the people in Athens get to know the God they did not know, He identifies the fact that this God who created the world and everything in it (who is Lord of heaven and earth) is very different from the gods they had been seeking. Within ancient Greece and Athens, there were many temples that had been constructed for their various gods. Many remnants remain of these temples to this very day. And, their gods were generally believed to have dwelled in these ornate temples made by man (though there were some who believed otherwise). Yet, the apostle Paul wanted the Athenians to recognize that the true God they did not know “does not dwell in temples made with hands” (verse 24).

## ***The tabernacle and temple***

“But, what about the tabernacle and temple?” – you may be asking. “Didn’t the Israelites build these marvelous structures for God to dwell in?” Let’s take a moment to evaluate this question. And, as we consider this, we will actually discover the truth of what the apostle Paul told the Athenians and should be even more in awe of the one true and living God.

First, consider the tabernacle. The tabernacle was God’s tent (during the time the Israelites moved from Sinai to the land of Canaan). This structure was designed to be portable so that it could be erected each place God’s people went. And, as you read in Exodus 25-31, Moses was given very detailed and specific instructions regarding how this tabernacle was to be constructed. Then, Exodus 35-40 details the actual construction of it. You would do well to take some time to read these chapters. For, as you do, you should discover how spectacular this structure was – particularly the furnishings and most holy place in the tabernacle.

You should notice the kinds of material that were used in constructing this tabernacle for God. Offerings were taken from the Israelites of gold, silver, and bronze – along with blue, purple, and scarlet thread, fine linen, goats’ hair, ram skins dyed red, badger skins, acacia wood, oil, spices, sweet incense, and onyx stones (see Exodus 25:3-7). These

all had various purposes, according to the pattern God revealed for the tabernacle. In addition, very gifted artisans were selected to do much of the work that needed to be done (see Exodus 31). The end result was an absolutely magnificent structure that was filled with some of the most precious material available to mankind!

Second, consider the temple. With the Israelites now settled in the land of Canaan, it was the desire of King David to erect a more permanent structure for God in Jerusalem. However, it is worth considering the fact that David was not permitted to build the temple of God because he had been a man of war (see 1 Chronicles 22:8-10). Therefore, this task would be accomplished by David’s son, King Solomon. However, during the end of David’s life, he worked to gather material that would be used to construct the temple of God. And, as you read in 1 Chronicles 29, David recognized the need for this temple to be absolutely magnificent (since it was not for man – but for God, see verse 1). So, David instructed the people of Israel to bring gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood, onyx stones, glistening stones, precious stones, and marble slabs to be used in the construction of this temple for the Almighty Creator.

Then, after David’s death, Solomon commenced with the actual building of this magnificent structure. Take some time to read 1 Kings 6 and 2 Chronicles 3-7 to see the description of this temple that was constructed (a project with took seven years to complete).

## ***The fullness of God cannot be contained in any man-made structure***

Certainly, mankind would be amazed to see these glorious structures filled with the most precious materials known to exist. Yet, despite the magnificence of these two structures, neither of them could contain the fullness of God (though they did serve a temporary purpose in the observance of the Law of Moses)! Consider what King Solomon recognized after he had built the temple. 1 Kings 8:27 says, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You. How much less this temple which I have built!” Solomon simply never believed that he could ever construct a temple that was marvelous enough for the Lord of heaven and earth to fully dwell in!

Similarly, consider what the preacher Stephen said to those who were Jews in Acts 7. After reminding them of the fact that the Jewish fathers had built the tabernacle according to the pattern given to Moses and that Solomon built God a house, he said, “However, the Most High does not dwell in temples made with hands, as the prophet says: ‘Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. What house will you build for Me? Says the Lord, Or what is the place of My rest? Has My hand not made all these things?’” (Acts 7:48-50). Simply put, how could man (who God has created) possibly use the things God has created to build Him a temple that would be magnificent enough for Him to dwell in? As Paul told the Athenians, this God simply “does not dwell in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24).

## **He Is Not In Need Of Our Service (Acts 17:25)**

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Not only is this true and living God more magnificent than the gods of the Athenians in that He does not dwell in temples made with hands, but Paul continues and says, “Nor is He worshiped with men’s hands, as though He needed anything, since He gives to all life, breath, and all things” (verse 25). While you do read about God having priests who would serve Him and His desire for all people to serve and worship Him, there is a big difference between this and the priests, worshipers, and servants of other gods. Namely, other gods are in *need* of people to serve and worship them. The Lord of heaven and earth is not!

### ***We cannot give God anything He cannot have for Himself***

What does the Almighty Creator of this world need from us? Who are we that we would have anything to give to God that He could not have for Himself? Listen to Romans 11:33-36: “Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?’ ‘Or who has first given to Him And it shall be repaid to him?’ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever. Amen.” Particularly focus on the question, “who has first

given to [God]” and will be repaid by Him? The answer, of course, is no one!

You see, it is not God who is in need of mankind. Instead, it is mankind who desperately needs God. Though God does desire for man to worship and serve Him, it is man who is in desperate need of serving and worshiping the Lord of heaven and earth. This is a major difference between the one true and living God and all other gods. You see, as Psalm 115 describes, “our God is in heaven” and “does whatever He pleases” (verse 3). But, their idols “are silver and gold, The work of men’s hands. They have mouths, but they do not speak; Eyes they have, but they do not see; They have ears, but they do not hear; Noses they have, but they do not smell; They have hands, but they do not handle; Feet they have, but they do not walk; Nor do they mutter through their throat” (verses 4-7). These gods *need* the worship and service of man – because they are inferior to man (since they are lifeless things that are made out of physical materials). But, the Lord of heaven and earth is far superior to man!

### ***He is the one who gives to all***

To continue, Paul said that God is the one who “gives to all life, breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25). These necessary things and everything that is good comes from Him. James 1:17 says that “Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation or shadow of turning.”

Just imagine. What could we possibly offer to God that He is incapable of having for Himself? For, even the best sacrifices that we could possibly offer to God come from Him! The Israelites (as we have seen) brought gold, silver, bronze, precious stones, etc. to God to build the tabernacle and temple. But, God was the one who provided those things! The Israelites were to sacrifice the best from their herds and crops. But, God was the one who provided those things! Today, God wants people to give their entire lives as living sacrifices to Him in order to serve Him in their lives (see Romans 12:1). But, God is the one who has given us life! So, yes, God does want us to serve and worship Him (as we will explore further in other lessons). But, He is not dependent upon our service and worship!



## **He Is The One Who Created Us (Acts 17:26-28)**

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After identifying God's sovereignty through His power and independence, Paul then turned His attention specifically to God's creation of mankind. Unlike the gods the Athenians had commonly worshiped and served, this one true God is responsible for mankind's existence. "And He has made from one blood every nation of men to dwell on all the face of the earth, and has determined their preappointed times and the boundaries of their dwellings, so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being, as also some of your own poets have said, 'For we are also His offspring'" (verses 26-28).

### ***We exist because of God***

This God did not need a creator. But, man did. And, it is this God who gives life, breath, and all things to everyone who has created all mankind. There are not different gods for different people. All mankind has descended from Adam (the man God first created) and Eve (the woman God first created). And, it is this God who providentially intervenes in the affairs of mankind.

No, various species did not evolve over millions and billions of years to form mankind (as briefly discussed earlier in this lesson). Instead, this Almighty God who created the world and everything in it formed man from the dust of the ground which God had made and "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Genesis 2:7). Then, when God saw that it was not good for man to be alone, He caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man and "took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh in its place. Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man He made into a woman, and He brought her to the man" (Genesis 2:21-22). Yes, even as you look at the magnificent way the human body works manifests the fact that there is an intelligent Designer and Creator. And, manifests that we all come from the same God (see Malachi 2:10)! Therefore, we are truly His offspring!

### ***We exist to seek God***

But, why did God create mankind if He does not need us? Why did He create the universe in the marvelous ways He has created it? Listen carefully to what Paul told the Athenians. He said that God has made mankind "so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us" (verse 27)!

First, recognize that God has created us with the ability to seek Him (as we will discuss further in lesson 2). Two things are important to recognize this truth: God created us in His image and we have been created with free will. Genesis 1:26-27 identifies the fact that mankind has been created in the image of our Creator. This means that mankind has been created with a spiritual existence (since God is Spirit, John 4:24) – not just a physical existence. Then, to have been created with free will means that this Sovereign God has given mankind the ability and opportunity to either choose to seek Him during their earthly lives or not to seek Him. He has not forced His will upon mankind (so as to force man to seek God).

Second, recognize that God has created us in His image and given us free will so that we will make the decision to seek after Him. He wants us to seek Him. He wants us to search and feel our ways toward Him – promising us that we can find Him because He is not far from us! So, He wants every decision that we make to be guided by His will. He wants us to choose Him rather than choose to live for ourselves. In fact, the Scriptures teach that seeking after God is the only thing that really matters in life (see Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)!

## **He Is The One Who Possesses Divine Nature (Acts 17:29)**

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As Paul has stated, even some of the poets who were known to those in Athens had said, "For we are also His offspring" (verse 28). Now, the Stoic poet Aratus was speaking of Zeus whenever he made this claim. But, Paul is going to apply the conclusion of their own poets to make an essential point about the nature of the true God. Listen to verse 29.

“Therefore, since we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Divine Nature is like gold or silver or stone, something shaped by art and man’s devising.”

### ***Such a God could not be represented by an image formed by man’s imagination***

The Athenians believed that they were the offspring of a god – just not the God who is Lord of heaven and earth. So, Paul encouraged them to think about themselves. They needed to realize how spectacular the human body is and how it functions in just the right way. The question, then, becomes: How could a god who can be accurately represented by a statue made of gold, silver, stone, or anything man could devise and make possibly be responsible for man’s existence?

The simple answer is that it is unreasonable to conclude that a living and intelligent being like mankind could be the offspring of a such a god! Such a God would be far too great and magnificent to be represented by something mankind could devise or make – even if he used the most precious materials available!

### ***God is Divine***

Instead of thinking about the God mankind is the offspring of in this kind of way, Paul encouraged them to recognize that this God is Divine! The Psalmist recognized this truth and expressed his praise to God in connection with how God had made him in Psalm 139:14. “I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; Marvelous are Your works, And that my soul knows very well.”

Again, remember that seeing the things God has made plainly reveals that there is a God and that God possesses eternal (limitless) power and is Divine (Romans 1:19-22). So, not only can you know these truths by looking to the things in this world; but, also by considering how wonderfully God has designed you (and all mankind). Particularly (for the purposes of this point), allow yourself to recognize that you are the offspring of a God who possesses Divine nature!

What does it mean for God to possess Divine nature? It means that God had no creator. It means that God is eternal – having no beginning and no end. It means that God is capable of doing whatever He

desires to do. It means that God is capable of knowing anything He desires to know. It means that God is capable of seeing anything He desires to see. And, it means that there is no place that mankind can hide from this God!

## **He Is The Judge Of The World (Acts 17:30-31)**

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As Paul concludes his teaching to the people in Athens, he does so by pointing them to the ramifications of the truths he has just identified about this God who is Lord of heaven and earth. Consider verses 30 and 31. “Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.”

### ***God’s authority over the world will allow Him to judge it***

Remember that this God is Lord of heaven and earth. He created it and everything on it – including mankind. Therefore, He is the only one who has the authority to judge it! And, He has promised that He will do exactly that. Furthermore, since He has all authority, He can use whatever standard/criteria He so chooses whenever He judges the world. Fortunately for mankind, He has revealed this standard to mankind so that we can prepare ourselves for this Day of Judgment. This standard, as we will discover in a later lesson, is revealed in the pages of His word (the Bible).

Particularly, Paul states that God will judge the world in righteousness (fairly). And, He will carry out this Judgment through the one He has appointed – Jesus Christ (compare with Matthew 25:31-46, Romans 14:10-12, and 2 Corinthians 5:10). Paul states that God has “given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead.” We will consider the sacrifice made by this one who will judge us further in lesson 2. For now, recognize that this God was able to raise Jesus Christ from the dead and He did so in order to provide us the victory over sin and death!

## ***He commands all mankind to repent***

But, as you contemplate the reality of standing before the God who has been described in Acts 17, you should certainly have the burning desire to seek after Him during the course of your life. Now, as you consider all of this, you should recognize that none have perfectly sought after God in their lives (Psalm 14:1-3). Therefore, God now “commands all men everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30).

To “repent” is to turn away from the sin you have committed during the course of your lifetime. You must recognize that you have made decisions in your life that have not pleased God. Therefore, you must determine that you will not practice those wicked things any longer so that you might seek God in your life by doing His will! Turning to God and seeking Him is the only hope we have for salvation from sin! Remember, we must believe that God is and that He is the rewarder of those who diligently seek Him (Hebrews 11:6).

## **Conclusion**

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Surely the God Paul has described is the God we should seek! No other god is worthy to be sought! However, as Paul experienced in Acts 17, not everyone will make the decision to seek this God. After people had listened to what Paul said, some mocked, some wanted to hear more, and some believed (see verses 32-34).

So, how will you respond to this message about God? Will you mock it, claiming that there is no such God? Will you remain undecided, failing to act upon these truths? Or, will you believe it, choosing to seek God?

## **Study Questions**

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What two aspects of faith is necessary to please God, according to Hebrews 11:6?

What is the context of Acts 17:16-31?

### **1. He Is Lord Of Heaven And Earth (17:24a)**

How can you know that God exists and that He is the Almighty Creator?

List some Bible examples that demonstrate God’s authority over all things.

### **2. He Cannot Be Contained In Any Temple (17:24b)**

Briefly describe the magnificence of the tabernacle and the temple.

Despite the magnificence of these structures, what does 1 Kings 8:27, Acts 7:44-50, and Acts 17:24 teach? Draw conclusions from this fact.

### **3. He Is Not In Need Of Our Service (17:25)**

Can we give God anything that He cannot have for Himself?

What does God give to all?

### **4. He Is The One Who Created Us (17:26-28)**

Did God need a creator? Explain how God created mankind.

Why did God create us if He did not need us?

### **5. He Is The One Who Possesses Divine Nature (17:29)**

Could this God (as has been described in this study) be represented by an image formed by man's imagination? Why or why not?

What did the Psalmist recognize about how he had been created (Psalm 139:14)? What conclusion, then, should we come to about God's nature?

### **6. He Is The Judge Of The World (17:30-31)**

Does God have the authority to judge the world? Who will God judge the world through?

What does God command of everyone?

# Lesson 2:

## Why We Should Seek God

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Seeking God is central to living a life that is pleasing to God. So, I invite you to consider the question Jesus asked some who followed Him in John 1:38: “What do you seek?” Certainly, there are many different things and people we can spend our earthly lives seeking after – and there are various reasons of why we would want or not want to seek after each of these.

In Philippians 2:21, Paul stated that “all seek their own, not the things which are of Christ Jesus.” His point reminds us that most people choose to seek their own physical desires while they live on this earth, considering the temporary pleasures they will experience through doing so to be worthwhile.

However, in this lesson, I want you to consider why you should seek God during the course of your earthly life. In the language of Colossians 3:1, I want you to consider why you should “seek those things which are above.” In contrast with the physical things most everyone else on this earth is seeking, I hope this lesson will help to convince you to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33). During the course of this lesson, consider six powerful reasons you should be seeking God absolutely first during your life.

In the first lesson of this series, I suggested that we cannot seek God if we do not know who He is. So, we spent our time in that lesson learning about the great and awesome God who is the only true and living God. But, the things we discussed in that lesson are not just facts that we should believe. Instead, they should be a primary motivation behind why we seek God.

### *The God we should seek*

Let’s spend a few moments highlighting the main points from lesson 1. Recall that the apostle Paul was in the city of Athens and saw that the city was given to idolatry. He could walk around the city and see that they were religious and devoted to many false gods. And, as he was observing the idols in their city, he even saw one with the inscription: “TO THE UNKNOWN GOD” (Acts 17:23). Therefore, Paul began to instruct them about the one true and living God they did not know.

First, he identified that this God is Lord of Heaven and earth. He is the one who created the world and everything that is in it – and possesses all authority over it. Second, this God cannot be contained in any temple. Although man has built spectacular structures (including the tabernacle and the temple), none were glorious enough to contain the fullness of this God. Third, this God is not in need of our service. Although He desires mankind to serve and worship Him, God is not dependent upon mankind’s service or worship. Instead, it is mankind who is fully dependent upon God. Fourth, God is the one who created us. God did not need a creator; but man did. Furthermore, God has created us so that we will seek after Him (as we will discuss further in this lesson). Fifth, this God is the one who possesses Divine nature. This God is too magnificent to be represented by anything that has been made by man – because this God possesses the full nature of being God. Sixth, this God is the Judge of the world. He has the authority to judge the world and He will do so through Jesus Christ one Day. Therefore, in light of this coming Judgment, God now commands all people everywhere to repent.

## ***We should desire a relationship with this God!***

At the end of lesson 1, I asked you to consider what you will do with this message about God. In Acts 17:32-34, some of the people who heard Paul's message originally mocked, some wanted to hear more, and some believed. So, just like these, you must absolutely determine what you will do with this message about God!

Go back to Acts 17:27 in order to see what God wants you to do with the understanding of who He really is. Paul said that God has created man "so that they should seek the Lord, in the hope that they might grope for Him and find Him, though He is not far from each one of us." Therefore, this magnificent God described by Paul in Acts 17, has created you (and all mankind) with the intention that you/we will seek Him!

And, if we really recognize and accept the truths about this God, shouldn't we want to devote our lives to seeking Him? After all, every good thing comes from Him. As we discovered in lesson 1, every good and perfect gift comes down to us from this God (see James 1:17). He is the one who "gives to all life, breath, and all things" (Acts 17:25). And, as Jesus states in Matthew 6:25-34, He is the one who will provide people even with the necessities of this life (i.e. food and clothing), if they seek Him first.

But, even more significant than the physical blessings which come from this marvelous God are the spiritual blessings He provides. Although God does bless both those who seek Him and those who do not seek Him from a *physical* perspective (see Matthew 5:43-47), He will only bless those who seek after Him *spiritually*. Therefore, this will be a primary focus of this lesson.

## **Because God Has Created Us With The Ability To Seek Him**

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God is truly an awesome God. And, this awesome God desires for us to seek Him (Acts 17:27). But, this would be a worthless endeavor if it was outside of our ability to do so. Thanks be to this

God for creating us with the ability to seek Him! Therefore, we should dedicate ourselves to making the best use of our lives and seek Him in the way He desires to be sought.

## ***We have been created in God's image***

In lesson 1, we discussed the fact that we are the offspring of this God. We considered some passages in Genesis 2 to help us understand that God did create us. But, we only considered the special way He has created us very briefly. For, the Genesis account of creation identifies that there was something unique about the way in which God has created us – that is not true about every other earthly thing He created (i.e. the plants, animals, etc.). This unique characteristic has a direct impact on our abilities to seek God.

Genesis 1:26-28 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 the 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. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'"

Notice that God gave mankind a special place in His creation of earthly things. It was only mankind who was made in the image of God. But, what image is this? And, what does being made in God's own image even mean for us? Is this a physical resemblance with God?

Not at all! God does not possess a physical element to His existence (i.e. a human body). Instead, Jesus said that "God is Spirit" (John 4:24). Therefore, even though mankind does have a physical existence, these passages help us to understand that there is more to our existence than this! We also possess a spiritual nature (i.e. a soul). Therefore, we have the *ability* to have a relationship with God and seek after Him (see Acts 17:26-28).

To see that this is true, consider man's relationship with God in the Garden of Eden. God prepared a garden for man to live in that was a paradise on this earth – with no death, no suffering, no sickness, etc. Furthermore, I would encourage you to read Genesis 3:8-13 and consider what this

passage indicates about the relationship the first man and woman (Adam and Eve) had with God in this place. While information is limited regarding the specifics of this relationship, this passage occurs right after Adam and Eve sinned against God and offers a small glimpse into the relationship they had with God. He directly communicated with them. And, He walked among them in some way. Yet, after they sinned, their relationship was changed and they experienced death. Physical death would result from their being separated from the Tree of Life (which had been in the Garden of Eden) and spiritual death resulted from the separation they experienced with God.

### ***Seeking God is our true purpose in life***

Similarly, we have also been created in the image of God and have the ability to be in fellowship with our awesome Creator and Lord! And, having a spiritual nature, we possess souls that will survive physical death and continue to exist (as we will discuss later in this lesson, see 2 Corinthians 5:1-8).

Being created in God's image, God has given us free will – allowing us either to spend our earthly lives seeking Him or seeking other things (just as Adam and Eve possessed this same free will). Unfortunately, most people who live on this earth choose to waste their earthly lives by seeking physical things. While God gives us the free will to do this, He also warns us that doing so will not result in long-term happiness. Jesus asked, “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul” (Matthew 16:26)? All of the physical things you will accumulate by seeking them are only temporary. Then, you will lose your soul and experience consequences for how you have lived.

The writer of the book of Ecclesiastes recognized the foolishness of seeking after physical things (recognizing their temporary nature). Then, he offered this conclusion: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14). In light of the fact that God will bring everything that we do while we have lived on this earth into Judgment (as also mentioned in Acts 17:30-31), we should recognize that the only thing that is truly worthwhile in life is to spend our entire

lives seeking God (fearing Him and keeping His commandments). And, we do this knowing God's promise that if we seek Him, we will also find Him (see Matthew 7:7-8 and Acts 17:27)!

## **Because Sin Has Separated Us From God**

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We have seen that we waste our lives if we do not seek God. Now, recognize that it is when we have failed to seek God with our whole hearts that we sin against God. Psalm 119:10-11 says, “With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments! Your word I have hidden in my heart, That I might not sin against You.” Sin, by its very definition, is failing to live according to the law God has given us to live by (see 1 John 3:4). And, the seriousness involved when we commit sin is that we separate ourselves from this God we should be seeking in our lives (we'll observe the consequences of doing this later).

### ***God is holy***

In order to understand sin properly, we must first understand another element of God's nature: He is holy. In Revelation 4:6-8, four living creatures are magnificently described. One is like a lion. One is like a calf. One had a face like a man. And, one was like a flying eagle. These four living creatures each had six wings and were full of eyes around and within. Then, I want you to notice what these magnificent creatures were doing in Heaven. These were around the throne of the Almighty God who is Lord of heaven and earth unceasingly proclaiming: “Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Who was and is and is to come” (verse 8)!

Yes, this Almighty God is a holy God. But, what exactly does it mean for this God we should seek to be holy – and how does it impact our attempts to seek Him? First, understand what it means for God to be holy. 1 John 1:5 helps us in this effort. It says, “This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all.” There is nothing evil that exists in God. He is entirely good and pure. He is as separated from evil as light is separated from darkness!

Second, understand that our holy God also calls us to be holy as He is holy. Listen to 1 Peter 1:15-16. Peter, after instructing some Christians not to live their lives according to their former desires (when they were living for the ways of sin) said, “but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, ‘Be holy, for I am holy.’” Just as God is holy in all of His nature, He desires for us to be separated from everything that is evil!

### ***Sin makes us enemies of God***

As Psalm 14:1-3 identifies (as we read and briefly discussed in lesson 1), none of us have sought God perfectly in our lives. We have all sinned and fallen short of glorifying God in our lives (Romans 3:23). And, whenever we sin against God, our relationship with Him is changed. We go from having fellowship and friendship with Him to being His enemies.

Consider Isaiah 59:1-2. “Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, That it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, That it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.” Whenever we are separated from God and find ourselves as His enemies, we should absolutely be assured that the problem is not with God. God did not sever the relationship. Instead, it is our sin that separates us from God. This separation from God is spiritual death. And, Romans 6:23 says that the “wages of sin is death.” It is, therefore, what we earn/deserve when we sin.

1 John 1:6 helps us understand why this is so. Recall that verse 5 identified the fact that God is as separated from evil as light is from darkness. Then, verse 6 says, “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.” We simply cannot remain in fellowship with a perfectly holy God whenever we do things that are contrary to His nature.

1 John 2:15-17 instructs us not to love the world or the things in the world because the things that are in the world (i.e. the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life) are not of the Father (God), but are of the world. They are contrary to God's holy nature. And, they are only temporary. Therefore, whenever we live according to our own fleshly desires rather than do the things God desires us to do, we make ourselves enemies of the Almighty

God who will judge us. James 4:4 says, “Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity [hostility] with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.”

## **Because Of What God Has Done For Us**

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So, sin is what has separated us from the Almighty God we studied about in lesson 1! And, we have all committed sin. Therefore, sin is what has accelerated the need to seek after God! The problem is that no matter how diligently we try to seek after God, we cannot undo the sin we have committed and the separation we have made between us and God. At least, we cannot do this by ourselves. Fortunately, God has loved us enough to provide His Son as the Savior of the world to provide us with the opportunity to be restored to a place of friendship and fellowship with Him. So, given the significance of the sacrifice that was made for us, we should be driven to seek God.

### ***Jesus Christ is our Savior***

Romans 6:23 says, “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” We all deserve to experience the consequences of sinning against our holy God. However, God has provided the gift of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Along with being holy, this Almighty Creator is also full of love. 1 John 4:8 says that “God is love.” Surely this God has demonstrated His love toward us in many ways. But, there has been no greater manifestation of God's love than in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. John 3:16 explains: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” Let's attempt to gain a greater appreciation of this truth by examining this verse in more detail.

First, God so loved *the world*. This includes everyone who has ever sinned or will ever sin against God. They had decided not to seek God, choosing instead to seek their own selfish desires. They had been separated from fellowship with this holy God



and were His enemies. Yet, even when we were sinners and His enemies, God loved us.

Second, God loved us so much that *He gave His only begotten Son*. This is Jesus Christ. Even though Jesus Christ also possessed the nature of being God, He willingly left Heaven and came to this earth in order to fulfill the eternal plan of salvation God had prepared. And, even though Jesus did not commit any sin while He lived on this earth (Hebrews 4:15), Jesus willingly experienced the hatred of this world, was arrested, was falsely accused, was severely beaten, was mocked, was spat on, and was nailed to a cross. There, having had nails driven through His hands and His feet, Jesus Christ hung until He died (read Matthew 26-27). God (the Father) willingly gave His Son to endure all of this and Jesus Christ experienced these things because of their love for the world. Then, God also raised this Jesus from the dead (see Matthew 28)!

Third, God loved us and gave His only begotten Son so that *whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life*. This is what is accomplished through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. It gives those who believe in Him the opportunity to *not perish* (i.e. not experience the consequences of the sins they had committed) and to *have everlasting life* (i.e. an opportunity that was forfeited whenever we committed sin). We'll explore both of these in just a moment. But, before we do, I want us to recognize that this blessing is not unconditional. This verse identifies belief as a necessary requirement. Now, please understand that this belief is not merely a mental acceptance of who Jesus is. But, remember that Hebrews 11:6 (as quoted at the beginning of the lesson) said we must believe that God is and that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. So, seeking God is at the heart of receiving this gift of God!

### ***We should allow the love of Christ to control us***

1 John 4:19 says, "We love Him because He first loved us." Given everything that God has done for us in showing love toward us, we should love Him enough that we will seek Him with all of our beings. In Matthew 22:37-38, Jesus said that the greatest commandment in the law is to "love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." I want you to now consider two passages that help us understand how the love God

has shown to us through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ ought to motivate us to seek God. Yes, God wants us to be motivated to seek Him by His love!

First, consider 2 Corinthians 5:14-15. Paul writes that the love Christ has demonstrated for us ought to "compel" us. That is, it ought to control us (i.e. all of our decisions in life) to recognize that Jesus Christ died for us. Surely, such a great manifestation of love for us ought to motivate us to live no longer for ourselves – but for the one who died for us and rose again!

Second, consider Titus 2:11-14. The passage begins by stating that "the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men." God's gift of salvation has been made available for everyone. And, this opportunity to be saved ought to impact our lives in such a way that we would turn away from living for sin so that we can live for God and be ready for the Day Jesus Christ will come in final Judgment. Then, verse 14 says that Jesus Christ "gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works." That is, Jesus Christ did not sacrifice His life on the cross so that we could continue to seek earthly things. Rather, He died so that we will seek Him and zealously live according to His instructions!

## **Because Of What It Means If We Do**

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If we will allow the love of Christ to control us and zealously seek Him during the course of our physical lives, we are promised great blessings. Remember, God has promised to judge the world by Jesus Christ one Day (see Acts 17:30-31). And, recall that Hebrews 11:6 identifies that God is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. So, we should be dedicated to seeking God because of what it means if we do.

### ***We can be reconciled to God***

At one time, we were separated from God when we were living in our sins. But, through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, there is now reconciliation possible. Listen to 2 Corinthians 5:18-19. "Now all things are of God, who has reconciled us to Himself

through Jesus Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation, that is, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself, not imputing their trespasses to them, and has committed to us the word of reconciliation.”

The Greek word that is translated as “reconciled” in the *New King James Version* of the Bible has the meaning of changing or exchanging money for that of equivalent value. The spiritual application of this principle is seen in that we were spiritually “bankrupt” in our sins. The only way for us to be brought into a right relationship with our holy God was through the blood of Jesus Christ. There was nothing we could offer to God as an even exchange to cover our sins. We were in desperate need of Jesus’ blood to reconcile us to God.

1 Timothy 2:5-6 says that “there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.” The idea of a “mediator” is someone who intervenes between two others in order to make or restore peace and friendship between the two sides. This is exactly what Jesus has accomplished for us! Jesus has made it possible for the enemies of God to become friends of God.

But, as we have already established, this is not done unconditionally. For instance, Romans 5:1 says, “having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Not everyone who is living on this earth is seeking to be reconciled to God. In fact, Jesus said that most people will suffer the consequences of their sins because they will not seek Him (see Matthew 7:13-14). Ephesians 1:3 makes it abundantly clear that every spiritual blessing that God provides is only found “in Christ.” So, it is our responsibility to do what God requires to be “in Christ” (see Galatians 3:26-27). We’ll be examining more about what is involved in this in future lessons.

### ***We can live eternally with God in Heaven***

Remember that we have been created with a soul that survives physical death. Therefore, we need to consider the implications of seeking God on what will happen to us after our earthly lives are over. Consider a few passages that should help us understand the eternal blessings that will be given to those who seek God during their earthly lives.

First, Hebrews 5:9 says that Jesus Christ has become the “author of eternal salvation to all who

obey Him.” This is the tremendous opportunity to be saved from the consequences of our sins and have everlasting life in Heaven. Second, Galatians 6:7-8 teaches that we will reap what we have sown. So, if we sow to the Spirit throughout our earthly lives, then we will “reap everlasting life.” That is, those who devote their earthly lives to living according to God’s instructions (as revealed by the Spirit of God) will be given everlasting life in Heaven. Third, Romans 2:7 says that “eternal life” will be given to “those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality.” On the Day when God judges the world through Jesus Christ, these who sought God and the things He provides will be granted this eternal life.

That this everlasting (never-ending) life is in Heaven with God can be seen from many Bible passages. First, Jesus promised His disciples that He would return and take them to the place He was preparing to go (see John 14:1-6). This was a reference to Heaven. Jesus said that He was going to prepare a place for them – and that there are many dwelling places in Heaven. Second, Jesus pictured the final Judgment Day in Matthew 25:31-46. In doing so, Jesus identified that the righteous would be told on that Day to come and “inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (verse 34). Third, 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17 says that when Jesus comes, the righteous will meet the Lord in the air and will “always be with the Lord.” Fourth, Revelation 21:1-22:5 depicts this place where those who sought God during their earthly lives will spend eternity. It is pictured as a place of rest, a place that is free from evil, pain, suffering, and death, and a place whose beauty is unimaginable. But, best of all, this passage pictures God as being in this place!

## **Because Of What It Means If We Don’t**

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Just as there are blessings and rewards that are associated with seeking God, there are consequences and punishment associated with failing to seek God. So, as you determine whether you desire to seek God or not, you need to understand what the consequences are for failing to seek God.

## ***We will remain separated from God***

During the time that we live on this earth, those who fail to seek God will remain separated from God in their sins. They will remain the enemies of God. They will fail to have access into the spiritual blessings God has provided in Jesus Christ.

1 Timothy 5:6 references such a situation whenever the text speaks of the reality that the one who lives for his/her own earthly pleasure and enjoyment will be “dead” while living. That is, this individual will be spiritually dead in sin (separated from the Almighty and holy God), while living physically.

However, while this kind of life offers physical pleasures, it has no hope! This is because this kind of life only has hope in the temporary things of life. Then, after this life is over, this individual will be separated from all that he/she enjoyed – and still be spiritually “bankrupt” in sin! Ephesians 2:12 depicts the reality of a life that is apart from Jesus Christ as being without hope and without God in the world. Therefore, this is a meaningless way to spend your life on earth!

## ***We will be separated from God for eternity***

Although this kind of earthly life is devastating enough, the worst is yet to come for such a one. Having a soul that survives physical death, there is an eternal consequence involved in dying physically while being dead spiritually. Just as those who were diligent in living according to God’s instructions will reap what they sow, those who lived to fulfill their own fleshly desires will also reap what they have sown (see Galatians 6:7-8). The difference is that they will reap “corruption” rather than everlasting life! Consider a few passages that should help to warn you about the eternal punishment awaiting those who fail to seek the Lord during their earthly lives and die in their sins.

First, listen to the words Jesus will say to those who failed to seek God during their earthly lives. In Matthew 25:41, Jesus said, “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.’” Then, verse 46 says that these will “go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Once again, this passage is in the context of the final Judgment. On this Day, those who failed to seek God during their earthly

lives will be instructed to depart from the presence of God. Thus, they will be separated from Him for all of eternity – sentenced to never-ending punishment in a place that has been prepared for the devil and his angels!

Second, consider Romans 2:8-9. On this Day of Judgment when those who have been diligently obedient to God will be rewarded (see verses 7 and 10), this passage says, “but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness – indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil, of the Jew first and also of the Greek.” Therefore, the one who is “self-seeking” will experience the wrath of the All-Powerful God we studied about in lesson 1. And, as Zephaniah 1:18 demonstrates, no one will be able to deliver himself/herself from the wrath of God – not even with silver and gold!

Third, consider 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9. While those who seek God will be granted rest when the Lord Jesus returns (verse 7), verses 8 and 9 pictures the following as the fate of those who do not seek Him: “in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.” Notice that these who do not obey God will experience two things. They will experience the wrath of the God they should have sought and they will be eternally separated from Him.

Fourth, consider Revelation 21:8. “But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.” This eternal punishment for those who have failed to seek God will be in the place the Bible calls Hell (see Matthew 10:28). The Scriptures consistently picture this place as being full of everything that we would find undesirable – and a place full of anguish. Particularly, this passage pictures it as a lake that is burning with fire and brimstone and identifies it as the “second death.” And, as we have already seen, this place will be a place of eternal spiritual death because it will be everlasting separation from God! Thus, it is separation from everything that is good.

# Conclusion

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There is surely ample reason to seek after the God who is Lord of heaven and earth! In fact, it is the only truly worthwhile thing that you will do with your life on this earth. For, if you miss out on the opportunity to spend eternity with God in Heaven (through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ), you have missed everything that is worth anything!

So, will you seek God? Will you allow these truths to impact your life in every area so as to seek God? Or, will you refuse to accept these truths (or only partially accept them) so as to live your life for your own physical desires? Either way, please recognize that you will stand before the Almighty God one Day in Judgment and you will reap what you have sown!

## Study Question

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Does everyone seek after God? If not, what else do people seek?

### 1. Because Of Who He Is

Review the main points from Acts 17 concerning the God we should seek.

Do you desire to have a relationship with this God? Explain your answer.

### 2. Because God Has Created Us With The Ability To Seek Him

What is the special way God has created mankind?

What is our true purpose in life?

### 3. Because Sin Has Separated Us From God

Explain what it means for God to be holy.

Why and how does sin change our relationship with God?

### 4. Because Of What God Has Done For Us

What has God done to save us from our sins?

How should the love God has shown for us motivate us to seek Him?

### 5. Because Of What It Means If We Do

What does it mean to be reconciled? How can we be reconciled to God?

What will be granted to those who seek God after life on this earth is over? Describe this reward.

### 6. Because Of What It Means If We Don't

What is the result of continuing to live in sin on this earth?

What punishment will be given to those who do not seek God after life on this earth is over? Describe this punishment.

# Lesson 3:

## What It Means To Seek God

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Seeking God is central to living a life that is pleasing to God. But, what exactly does it mean to seek God? Perhaps Deuteronomy 10:12-13 is a good place to begin. “And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require of you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and to love Him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the commandments of the Lord and His statutes which I command you today for your good?”

Although this instruction was given to the Israelites during the time the Law of Moses was in effect and is not the law that we live under today, it is a good place to begin. This passage still helps us to learn about how the God we have studied about has desired to be sought in the past by those who would be His people. And, as we will be observing during the course of this lesson, He still desires to be sought in these ways.

You see, since God is the one we should be seeking, He is the one who can tell us exactly what is involved in seeking Him. So, we seek after God by giving Him exactly what He desires from our lives. In this lesson, I want to understand what this looks like in a general way. We’ll be observing some of the essential elements that must be in the lives of those who desire to seek God – because these are the things He tells us are involved in seeking Him.

God wants those who seek Him to have faith in Him. In fact, there is no possible way to please this God without faith. Again, Hebrews 11:6 says, “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.” Specifically, this passage identifies two essential ingredients in a faith that pleases God: Believing that He exists and believing that He will reward those who seek Him.

### ***Believe that He exists***

In fact, faith is all the evidence an individual needs to devote his/her life to seeking after God. Verse 1 of Hebrews 11 says that faith “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Faith is the proper trust that we place in God’s reality and in the reality of His promises.

In lesson 1, we spent time examining the reality of this God’s existence. Particularly, Romans 1:19-22 helped us to see that we can be assured of God’s reality by observing the things God has created. In fact, this verse says that we can know about His “eternal power” and His Divine nature (“Godhead”) through the things He has made. So, God’s creation (i.e. the earth, the sun, the moon, the stars, the trees, the oceans, the rivers, the birds, the fish, the livestock, mankind, etc.) all present evidence of the fact that there is a God who possesses limitless power behind it all!

Reason demands that all of the things that exist around us must have had an origin. And, it is simply unreasonable to conclude that all of the order that exists throughout this world happened by chance or accident. Psalm 14:1 says that it is only a fool who would draw such a conclusion about the existence of this universe and all the order in it. Instead of drawing such a foolish conclusion about the origin of the world, Psalm 19:1 says that the “heavens declare the glory of God; And the firmament shows His handiwork.” So, as you observe everything in this universe, you can see marks of God’s handiwork throughout and be absolutely convinced that there is a God!

Then, not only must you believe that God exists; but, you must also believe that God is who He

claims to be. Recognize that you are not given the liberty to make the great and awesome God who is Lord of heaven and earth into whatever you desire for Him to be. Instead, you must listen to what He has revealed about His nature.

For instance, there are some who want to make this great God into something they want Him to be rather than who He has declared Himself to be. So, they put their “faith” in a God who is all love and who overlooks all of the bad things people do. They fool themselves into thinking that this awesome God will not punish those who sin against Him. However, God has revealed that He is both a good and a severe God (see Romans 11:22). Yes, He has revealed that He is a God of love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness. But, He has also revealed that He will punish those who do not obey Him (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9). Therefore, you must put your trust in God – and trust that He is exactly who He claims to be!

### ***Believe that He will reward those who seek Him***

The kind of faith God requires of those who seek Him is more than just mentally accepting His reality. Hebrews 11:6 demonstrates that the second element to acceptable faith is to believe that He will reward those who diligently seek Him. So, acceptable faith involves the correct *response* to the reality of God. It is trust in God that leads us to *something*.

And, that *something* is obedience! Hebrews 11 contains many examples of this kind of true faith in God. Consider just a few of these examples with me. By faith Abel offered a sacrifice that was pleasing to God (verse 4). By faith Noah moved with godly fear in order to prepare an ark for the saving of his household (verse 7). By faith Abraham obeyed God whenever God instructed Him to leave His homeland and go to the land God would give to Abraham’s descendants (verses 8-10). By faith Abraham offered Isaac on the altar whenever God tested him (verses 17-19). By faith Moses chose to suffer with God’s people rather than enjoy the temporary pleasures of sin in Egypt (verses 24-28). By faith the Israelites encircled the walls of Jericho so that they would collapse (verse 30).

Observe a key similarity in all of these examples of faith that are given in Hebrews 11. All of these demonstrate the two essential elements of true faith that pleases God identified in verse 6. They

all were convinced in the reality of God *and* they acted upon the things God had instructed of them, knowing that there was a reward for seeking God! Surely, these individuals would not be commended as examples of faith if they had only believed in God’s existence. Just imagine. What if Abel believed in God but did not offer an acceptable sacrifice to God (i.e. like Cain did)? What if Noah believed in God but did not build an ark? What if Abraham believed in God but did not leave his homeland or sacrifice Isaac on the altar? What if Moses believed in God but chose to stay in Egypt and enjoy the pleasures of sin? What if the Israelites believed in God but chose not to march around the city of Jericho?

Instead of viewing faith as only being a mental acceptance of God’s reality, we must have the faith that these individuals actually had in Hebrews 11. Yes, they were absolutely convinced of God’s reality. But, they did not stop there. Instead, because they were convinced of God’s reality and had full trust in what God had said, they obeyed.

You see, acceptable faith clearly is a full conviction in God that acts in obedience to God. This is the faith of the one who is seeking God. Without this kind of faith that is put into action, an individual simply cannot please God! Note that we will talk more about faith only in lesson 6.

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## **Fear God**

God wants those who seek Him to fear Him. In fact, not only is fearing God a *part* of seeking God, it is a core part of living according to our God-given purpose on earth. In Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, the writer of the book of Ecclesiastes concluded the following about the true purpose of mankind on this earth: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.”

### ***Two elements involved in fearing God***

Think back to lesson 1. Certainly, the God we studied about is a God we should fear. After all, He is the Almighty, All-Knowing, Ever-Present God who will judge us some day. Yes, as revealed by Ecclesiastes 12, this God wants you to fear Him. But,

what exactly does it mean to fear God? Let's consider two essential elements involved in properly fearing God.

First, you must possess a reverential respect for this God. Indeed, you should stand in awe of the one true and living God. There is none more powerful or more authoritative than the Lord of heaven and earth! So, in recognition of the true greatness of this God, you should live your life with respect and honor for Him. You should recognize that He has complete authority in every aspect of life. And, you should fully submit yourself to His authority.

Second, you must possess a terror of this God. You should consider what it means to violate the laws and commandments this God has established by His authority, recognizing that He will judge you one Day for how you have lived in comparison with His law. Therefore, the Hebrew writer warned, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Hebrews 10:31). You see, this God (as we considered in lesson 2) has said that there will be consequences for those who fail to live their lives according to His authority. Therefore, after considering the fact that all mankind will stand before Jesus Christ in judgment, the apostle Paul wrote, "Knowing, therefore, the terror of the Lord, we persuade men; but we are well known to God, and I also trust are well known in your consciences" (2 Corinthians 5:11).

### ***Work out your salvation with fear and trembling***

Just as we observed with regard to faith, God does not want you to fear Him – and do nothing with this fear! Instead, a true fear of God will lead you to living your life in the way God desires you to live. The apostle Paul instructed the Philippian Christians to "work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

Like the Philippians, God expects each of us to work out our own salvations with fear and trembling. This implies that we do not just seek God for salvation in any way we *feel* is right. Instead, we make the appropriate applications of respecting God and His ultimate authority by living our lives in full submission to the things He has instructed. And, a terror of rebelling against the authority of this great God ought to continuously motivate us to do everything we can do to keep His commandments!

Throughout the pages of the Bible, we can observe numerous examples of both those who feared God and those who did not fear God. Those who feared Him respected Him and the authority that He had. Knowing the consequences of violating His instructions, they obeyed Him. However, those who did not fear Him did not demonstrate respect for God's authority and were not afraid of the consequences God promised for disobedience. Therefore, they would not listen to God.

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## **Love God**

God wants those who seek Him to love Him. In fact, whenever Jesus was asked which commandment was the greatest commandment in the law, Jesus responded, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment" (Matthew 22:37-38). Today, loving God is no less important than loving God was at that time.

### ***We love God because He first loved us***

In fact, we should even be driven to greater love for God today because we can know the great love God has shown for mankind. Though God has demonstrated His love for mankind in many ways throughout the years, there has been no greater demonstration of love than in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ on the cross. In this sacrifice, God willingly sent His only begotten Son to this earth to be despised by the world, falsely accused, arrested, beaten, spat on, mocked, and nailed to a cross in execution so that those who had failed to seek Him could be forgiven of their sins, saved from the eternal punishment they deserved to experience, and have everlasting life with Him in Heaven (see John 3:16)!

Therefore, 1 John 4:19 says, "We love Him because He first loved us." By the love God has shown for us, we learn about what it means to truly love God. We learn that the love of God was not just a love that was shown in word – but a love that was demonstrated in sacrificial action! It was a love that put others ahead of oneself. Think about it. It cost God dearly to send His only Son to earth and watch Him suffer and die. But, He was willing to sacrifice in this way because He knew mankind desperately

needed a Savior – and would not have any way to be saved without this kind of sacrifice. So, God sacrificially put the needs of mankind before His own desires.

### ***Two essential elements to loving God***

Certainly, we should respond in love toward this one who demonstrated such great love for us. But, how can we love God? Since God’s love for mankind was not just a verbal pronouncement, our love for God must go further than that also! In fact, we are taught that God’s love ought to control our actions, resulting in giving our lives entirely to the one who gave His life for us (see 2 Corinthians 5:14-15). Consider two essential elements, then, to having a love that pleases God.

First, we must keep His commandments. After all, what good would claiming to love God be if we did not do the things that He said? In John 14:15, Jesus said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” Notice that keeping God’s commandments is a test to see if we truly love God or not. In fact, it is unreasonable to believe that we truly love God if we are willing to put our own desires above God’s desires! Instead, true love for God is seen whenever we are willing to put the desires of God above our own.

Second, we must not view the commandments of God to be burdensome. 1 John 5:3 says, “For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome.” So, it is not enough to merely go through the motions of keeping God’s commandments. For, it is not true love if you are grumbling and complaining about God’s commandments while you are trying to keep them! Instead, just as it was “according to the good pleasure” of God’s will to provide Jesus Christ as a sacrifice for the world (Ephesians 1:5), you must willingly and joyfully accomplish the will of God in your life.

## **Sacrifice To God**

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God wants those who seek Him to sacrifice to Him. In fact, even a casual observance of the Bible should be able to conclude that God’s people frequently offered sacrifices to God. In the Old

Testament, this primarily included sacrifices involving animals and crops. But, even though the nature of the sacrifice has changed in the New Testament, the principle of sacrifice remains the same. The sacrifice of the one who is seeking God today involves presenting your body as a “living sacrifice, holy acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service” (Romans 12:1).

### ***What it means to sacrifice to God***

What are the principles involved in sacrificing to the God who is Lord of Heaven and earth? Certainly, such a God is worthy of much more than we could ever offer Him in a sacrifice! Therefore, God has always required the best of what mankind can offer Him.

Recognize that God has always demanded the best and the “firsts” of what mankind has to sacrifice. Under the Law of Moses, the Israelites were told to offer animal sacrifices that were without blemish/flip. That is, they were not to make sacrifices of their sickly or deformed animals. Instead, God wanted them to offer Him the best of their flocks. In addition, the Israelites were also required to make an offering from the first crops of their fields.

Therefore, sacrifices that are made to God are expected to cost mankind something. We must not give God the “leftovers” of our lives after we have spent the best and firsts on things that please ourselves. Instead, we must put God absolutely first in our lives.

Consider the example of David in 2 Samuel 24. After David had sinned and determined that he needed to make a sacrifice to God, David sought to buy the provisions necessary for the sacrifice. However, the individual David sought to buy these from offered to simply give the provisions for the sacrifice to the king. Yet, consider David’s response in verse 24: “No, but I will surely buy it from you for a price; nor will I offer burnt offerings to the Lord my God with that which costs me nothing.”

### ***What our sacrifice to God must look like***

Yes, God is worthy of much more than sacrifices that cost us little or nothing. In fact, a number of New Testament passages help us to understand that God requires much more than that from our sacrifices. Again, consider Romans 12:1. The nature of the sacrifice God wants from each one



of those who seek Him is the sacrifice of our entire lives. Yes, our bodies are to be presented to God as living sacrifices that are according to His desires and expectations.

Other passages help us to understand the same thing. Matthew 6:33 instructs that we seek God absolutely first in our lives. Luke 9:23-26 instructs that we deny ourselves and follow Jesus Christ to the point that we are even willing to suffer and die for Him. Luke 14:25-27 and 33 instructs that Jesus Christ be put absolutely first in our lives (even ahead of our physical possessions, family members, and our lives). And, Luke 9:57-62 teaches that once we begin to sacrifice our lives to God we must not turn away from Him.

So, this is a complete sacrifice of our lives to God. In seeking the God who is Lord of Heaven and earth, we give the best our lives have to offer Him and put Him absolutely first. And, everything that is involved in our lives is included in this sacrifice. Our time must be sacrificed to God according to these principles of acceptable sacrifice – as well as our money, our energy, our relationships, our possessions, etc. We give it all to the one who created us and sacrificed His only begotten Son for us so that we could live eternally with Him!

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## Obey God

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God wants those who seek Him to obey Him. This has been an essential principle to so many of the things we have already been discussing. The following statement made about Ezra should be helpful in seeking after God ourselves. Ezra 7:10 says, “For Ezra had prepared his heart to seek the Law of the Lord, and to do it, and to teach statutes and ordinances in Israel.” Yes, people who have sought God throughout history have always been required to obey the things God instructed of them.

### ***Without obedience, we cannot please God***

Although it is true that we cannot seek God by trying to earn our way to Him through our meritorious works (see Ephesians 2:8-9), God *does* still demand our obedient works. Recall that Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 said that fearing God and keeping His commandments are included in the whole duty of mankind. Also, Hebrews 5:9 states that

Jesus Christ has become “the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.”

God, in His great authority, has given mankind a law to live by that perfectly directs mankind into the ways He desires us to live (see 2 Timothy 3:16-17). How, then, could we expect to seek this God’s favor if we are unwilling to obey His instructions? We simply cannot! Therefore, James instructed, “But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves” (James 1:22). Quite simply, we do deceive ourselves into thinking that we are seeking God whenever we know the right things but do not make the appropriate applications of them to our lives.

### ***We must submit ourselves to God***

The issue of obedience is the issue of submission. To “submit” is to yield oneself to the desires of another. Specifically, this is what God commands of those who seek Him. James 4:7 says, “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.”

Submitting to God requires that we recognize His ways as best. For, in order to yield our own desires to the desires of God, we will necessarily be denying ourselves of our own pleasures and desires. So, Proverbs 3:5-6 teaches us to trust in God with all of our hearts, refuse to lean on our own understandings, and acknowledge Him in all our ways so that He will direct our paths.

All of this means that we must recognize the need to place more emphasis on obeying God’s instructions during the course of our lives than we do on our own selfish physical desires and ambitions. Whatever God tells us to do, we must obey! Then, as we have already discussed, our obedience to God’s commandments must not be viewed as a burdensome thing (1 John 5:3).

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## Serve God

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God wants those who seek Him to serve Him. In a continuation of the previous point, God wants us to make a clear decision in our lives as to whom we will serve. Like Joshua, God wants those who seek Him to declare that “we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15). You see, Joshua recognized that people will serve something/someone in their lives. The question

is simply: “Who/what will you serve?” Certainly, those who desire to seek God must make the decision to serve Him – and Him only.

### ***From a servant of sin to servant of righteousness***

Romans 6 describes the transformation that those who have become Christians have experienced. At one time in their lives, they were servants of sin and unrighteousness (i.e. things that were contrary to God’s holy ways). At this time, they were using their bodies to serve their own ungodly desires rather than accomplishing the will of God in their lives. However, this kind of service was only going to result in spiritual death (see verses 21 and 23).

However, while they were slaves of sin, they obeyed the teachings (doctrines) of God and were “set free from sin” to become “slaves of righteousness.” And, rather than serving a master that would result in spiritual death, serving God would result in holiness and everlasting life (see verses 22-23). Then, while serving this new master of God’s righteousness, consider what verses 12-13 conclude about how we must use our physical bodies. “Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God.”

### ***Must serve God only***

As Romans 6:12-13 helps us to see, the lives that we live (if we desire to seek God) must be entirely devoted to the service of God by accomplishing the things that are right in His sight. We must consider ourselves His servants/slaves to be used in whatever way He desires. We must not consider our bodies to be our own to use to fulfill our own desires. Instead, we must recognize that we have been purchased with the precious blood of Jesus Christ and we should dedicate our entire lives in the service of the one who loved us and gave Himself to die for us (see 1 Corinthians 6:19-20)!

Yet, there are many times folks try to serve God while they also attempt to serve their own selfish desires. They try to use their bodies to accomplish both. But, Jesus said that it is an impossibility to serve God and serve another master. Matthew 6:24 records, “No one can serve two

masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.”

It is the same principle as we observed regarding the kind of sacrifice we must make to God. We must recognize that God’s service comes first – because He has sacrificed His only Son to ransom us from slavery to sin. Therefore, our bodies must always be prepared to carry out the things He requires of us in His service. Anytime we know how He wants us to serve Him and we choose to do something else, we fail to honor Him as our Master! Instead, we choose to serve a different master in our lives.

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## **Worship God**

God wants those who seek Him to worship Him. To worship God is the idea of bowing your heart in an expression of reverence before God. Consider what Jesus said in John 4:23-24: “But the hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth; for the Father is seeking such to worship Him. God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth.” So, not only do we learn from this passage that God is seeking those who will worship Him; but, we learn that there are two essential elements involved in worshipping God in the way He desires to be worshiped – worshipping Him in spirit and in truth.

### ***Worship God in spirit***

The expression of our worship to God requires that we recognize God is Spirit. Jesus plainly stated that “God is Spirit” in John 4:24. The conclusion is that we must worship Him in spirit. Though individuals could physically bow before and express their worship to Jesus while He lived on this earth (Matthew 28:11 says that two women held Jesus by His feet and worshiped Him), God does not exist in human form to worship Him in that way now.

Now, it requires the spiritual element of man to be engaged in worship. You see, as we discussed in lesson 2, God created mankind in His own image (see Genesis 1:26-27). Numerous Bible passages help us to understand that this means mankind has been created with a spiritual existence (a soul). Therefore, of all God’s earthly creation, it is only

mankind who is able to express worship to God. In fact, man (as a spiritual being) longs to worship. Unfortunately, mankind has often worshiped the wrong object or has failed to worship God acceptably.

The necessary element of worshiping God in spirit, then, requires that we be fully engaged in our expressions of worship. Since God does not exist in the flesh, we must bow our hearts before the awesome God. We must not just be going through the motions of an external act of worship – while allowing our hearts to be far away from God (as condemned in Matthew 15:8-9). Instead, we must be focused on whatever we are doing. For instance, when we sing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs in worship to God, we must be focused on the words and meanings of those songs and not focused on the melody or some other thing!

### ***Worship God in truth***

The expression of our worship to God also requires us to recognize that God has revealed an objective standard of truth. We cannot express our worship to God in just any way or corrupt the true nature of God. Instead, John 17:17 says that God’s word is truth. And, John 8:32 says that it is God’s truth that will set us free from sin. Yes, God has revealed His word of truth in the pages of the Bible.

Then, consider what Paul stated in Colossians 3:17. “And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.” God’s word reveals the standard for all things in our lives. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that the Scriptures (which have been given by inspiration of God) are profitable “for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.” Everything God wants us to be doing that pleases Him can be found within the pages of the Bible (His word of truth). Therefore, in everything that we do, we must have Bible authority! This is the only way to know that what we are doing pleases God.

Furthermore, this general truth must be applied specifically to our worship. We can only please God in our worship if what we are doing has Bible authority behind it! Otherwise, it is self-imposed worship (worship we are trying to force God to accept). Again, recognize that God has told us (in His word of truth) exactly what pleases Him in

worship. If we decide to offer Him something He does not want, how can we please Him through our worship? We simply cannot. As an example of this principle, God has authorized singing as an expression of worship to Him. Colossians 3:16 says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” However, in addition to the authorized action of singing, many people have attempted to worship God by using a mechanical instrument of music. Yet, God has not authorized the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship anywhere in the pages of the New Testament (which governs God’s people today). Simply put: Anything that is according to God’s standard of truth for worship is acceptable to Him. But, anything that He has not authorized is not acceptable to Him for worship!

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## **Conclusion**

Seeking God involves a complete commitment to God. Hopefully, you have been impressed by the simple fact that we cannot seek God without fully committing ourselves to and trusting in Him. He does not ask more of us than we are able to give to Him. But, He also will not accept any less from us than we are capable of giving Him!

So, will you commit yourself to seeking God in this complete way? Will you choose to “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” (Matthew 6:33)? Or, will you choose to only partially seek after Him? If you choose the latter, please recognize that God will not accept your service – because it is not God you are really seeking in your life!

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## **Study Questions**

How does Deuteronomy 10:12-13 help you learn about seeking God?

## **1. Have Faith In God**

How can we believe that He exists?

How does acceptable faith include the proper response to the reality of God?

## **2. Fear God**

What two elements are essential to fearing God?

How will the fear of God motivate us to the proper action?

## **3. Love God**

Why should we love God?

What does it mean to love God?

## **4. Sacrifice To God**

What does it mean to sacrifice to God?

What should our sacrifice look like?

## **5. Obey God**

Why will you fail to please God if you do not obey Him?

What does it mean to submit to God?

## **6. Serve God**

What transformation is explained in Romans 6?

Does God accept our service if we also attempt to serve someone/something other than Him?

## **7. Worship God**

What does it mean to worship God in spirit?

What does it mean to worship God in truth?

# Lesson 4: Examples Of Some Who Sought God

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Seeking God is central to living a life that is pleasing to God. And, we have just considered (in lesson 3) some elements that are essential to the life that desires to seek God. Now, I want us to consider the lives of some individuals recorded in the pages of the Bible to see how they sought God. Listen to Hebrews 12:1 as we begin this study. “Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.”

This statement comes immediately after the Hebrew writer has just commended many wonderful examples of faith to us – people like Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, Gideon, etc. Now, he demonstrates that these individuals are actually helpful to us in living lives that seek God. He says that they constitute a great “cloud of witnesses” and indicates that they ought to encourage us as we run our own race of faith to please God. With this language involving a race, the concept of these individuals being a great “cloud of witnesses” may

well compare these men and women of faith as spectators in an arena.

So, as we run our race of faith, trying to please God and seek Him diligently (as Hebrews 11:6 states), we can look around the arena and see Noah, Abraham, Moses, and the other great Bible examples of men and women who sought God during their lives cheering us on to victory! Surely, these examples ought to encourage us and help us to lay aside everything that would try to hinder us from seeking God in our lives and press toward the “finish line” in our own race. Therefore, let’s spend our time in this lesson considering seven examples (of many that could be discussed) that will help us to live in the way that seeks to please God. While the majority of these examples did not live under the same law of God we live under today, we can still learn from their commitment to seek God and the general principles they had in their lives.

## Noah

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Noah sought God in his life. As we read the Biblical record of this man’s life, he is among those cheering us toward victory in our race to seek God. Therefore, let’s take a few moments to learn some valuable lessons from Noah.

### ***Lived a life that was different from the world***

After Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden of Eden because of their sin, we read about mankind increasing in population on the earth. And, we also read of how man’s increasing population also corresponded with sin increasing on the earth. We read about Cain and his wickedness toward his brother Abel. We read about the wickedness of some of Cain’s descendants. Then, by the time we come to Genesis 6, God saw that the wickedness of man on the earth had reached a point that “every intent of the thoughts of [man’s] heart was only evil continually” (verse 5). In fact, the Lord was sorrowful that He had even made man on the earth (verse 6). Therefore, with this wickedness being so prevalent on the face of the earth, God determined that He would destroy man (verse 7). As the record in Genesis 6 continues to explain, God would do this by sending rain upon the earth to cover the entire world.

However, as God searched throughout the entire world for someone who would seek after Him and was only finding one wicked person after another, God saw that Noah was different. Genesis 6:8 says, “But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord.” Verse 9 describes Noah as a “just man, perfect in his generations” and says that “Noah walked with God.” Consequently, God would save him and his family from the destruction of the flood by means of an ark (more on that in just a moment).

Now, I do not know what kind of wickedness was prevalent on the earth during this time. I have little doubt that it was the same kind of wickedness that the Bible repeatedly identifies – and that is prevalent in our world today. But, regardless of the specifics, recognize that even though no one else besides Noah’s family sought God in this world, Noah still lived to please God. In fact, 2 Peter 2:5 describes Noah as having been a “preacher of righteousness.” This indicates that Noah not only lived a righteous life in a world of wickedness, but he also tried to convince others around him to live righteous lives that sought God!

### ***Obedied the instructions God gave him***

Because Noah sought God during the course of his life, he was going to be spared from the destruction of the flood by means of an ark God instructed him to prepare. In doing so, Noah and his family would be saved from the wickedness of the world (see 1 Peter 3:20). Listen to the testimony of Noah given in Hebrews 11:7. “By faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith.”

Noah believed in God. Noah believed that God was going to bring a great flood upon all of the earth. And, Noah believed that if he prepared an ark according to God’s instructions, God would save him and his family. But, Noah did not just mentally accept these things to be true. Instead, being warned of these things he had not seen, he “moved with godly fear” and “prepared an ark for the saving of his household.” His full confidence in God and in what God had said led him to take the appropriate actions.

So, whenever God promised to save Noah and his family by the ark, Noah built the ark according to God’s specifications. These

specifications included that the ark was to be built out of gopherwood, that rooms were to be made inside the ark, that the ark was to be covered inside and outside with pitch, that the length of the ark was to be 300 cubits (about 450 feet), that the width was to be 50 cubits (about 75 feet), that the height was to be 30 cubits (about 45 feet), that there was to be one window and one door, and that it was to have three decks/levels (see Genesis 6:14-16). In addition, God gave Noah instructions about the animals that were to be brought onboard the ark (see Genesis 6:19-21).

Given all of these instructions, certainly Noah had a great work to do. However, because of his unwavering trust in God, he acted with godly fear to do exactly as God commanded him. Genesis 6:22 says, “Thus Noah did; according to all that God commanded him, so he did.” Notice that Noah did not change any of the instructions God had given him (i.e. he did not change the type of wood the ark was to be made of, he did not change the dimensions of the ark, etc.). He simply did what God had instructed him to do. And, as a result, Noah and his family were saved onboard the ark!

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## **Abraham**

Abraham sought God in his life. As we read the Biblical record of this man’s life, he is among those cheering us toward victory in our race to seek God. Therefore, let’s take a few moments to learn some valuable lessons from Abraham.

### ***Obedied God in leaving his homeland***

In Genesis 12:1-3, the Lord said to Abraham (then named “Abram”): “Get out from your country, From your family And from your father’s house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

Can you just imagine being told by God to leave the your home and leave the place your family is – in order to go to a place that is entirely new to you? That is what Abraham was told to do. And, notice that the foundation of going to this land was because God promised to make Abraham a great nation, give his descendants the land he was told to

travel to (see verse 7), and bless all families of the earth through Abraham's descendants.

Now, verse 4 identifies the fact that Abraham went "as the Lord had spoken to him." But, in order to appreciate this great example of faith, we need to understand that Abraham (at this time) was 75 years old and had no children! Yet, Abraham fully trusted in God, knowing that He existed and that He would reward those who diligently sought Him. So, Hebrews 11:8 says concerning Abraham: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going."

### ***Obeyed God in sacrificing his son***

Later, after Abraham and his wife (Sarah) continued to grow older and remained childless, God continued to assure Abraham of these same promises. God assured them that He would bless them with a child. In Genesis 21, Isaac was born while Abraham was 100 years of age. Then, in Genesis 22, God tested Abraham's faith.

At this time, God commanded Abraham, "Take now your son, your only son Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you" (Genesis 22:2). Surely, this would not only be a difficult commandment for Abraham to hear as a father who dearly loved his only son; but, this son was also supposed to have been the son through whom God would fulfill the promises He had made to Abraham!

Yet, verse 3 says that Abraham "rose early in the morning" and went to the place God had commanded him, taking his son Isaac with him. On the third day, they arrived at the place God had specified and Abraham took his only son on the mountain, telling the young men who had traveled with them, "Stay here with the donkey; the lad and I will go yonder and worship, and we will come back to you" (verse 5). Taking all of the necessary provisions to complete the sacrifice, Isaac questioned his father about the animal for the sacrifice. To which Abraham faithfully responded, "My son, God will provide for Himself the lamb for a burnt offering" (verse 8).

When they came to the place for the sacrifice, Abraham built the altar, placed the wood in order, bound his son, and laid him upon the wood and the altar. Then, he stretched out his hand to take the knife

and slay his son, when the Angel of the Lord called to him and instructed him not to slay his son, saying that "now I know you fear God, since you have not withheld your son, your only son, from Me" (verse 12).

Consider the testimony of Abraham's faith recorded in Hebrews 11:17-19. The writer says that it was by faith that Abraham "offered up Isaac" because he had received the promises from God and concluded that "God was able to raise him up, even from the dead." So, Abraham acted with the fear of God in complete obedience to God because he was fully convinced that God existed and that God would reward those who diligently sought Him!

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## Moses

Moses sought God in his life. As we read the Biblical record of this man's life, he is among those cheering us toward victory in our race to seek God. Therefore, let's take a few moments to learn some valuable lessons from Moses.

### ***Chose to associate himself with the people of God***

Moses' story begins with the faithful example of his parents. During this time that the Israelites lived as slaves in the land of Egypt, the Pharaoh commanded that every son born to the people of Israel was to be cast into the river and killed. It was at this time Moses was born (read Exodus 1-2). However, Moses' parents refused to comply with the wicked decree of the king and hid him for three months in an ark made of bulrushes placed along the river bank. Hebrews 11:23 says that Moses' parents did this by faith, not fearing the king's command.

At this time, Pharaoh's daughter came to bathe in the river, discovered baby Moses, wept, and had compassion on him (even though she recognized that this was a child of the Israelites). After being nursed for a time by his own mother, Moses was adopted by Pharaoh's daughter. Therefore, Moses was the adopted grandson of the king of Egypt! As such, Moses would have had access to the best that the land of Egypt could have offered and could have chosen to live a life of sinful pleasure.

However, during a time when Moses went to his Hebrew brethren (the Israelites), he saw an Egyptian beating one of the Hebrews. So, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand. Later, God called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt (see Exodus 2-3). Moses was faced with a choice. He could continue to live in Egypt and enjoy all the temporary pleasures associated with such – or he could live according to the calling of God and lead the people of Israel.

Hebrews 11:24-26 explains Moses' choice and his reasoning. "By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward." Moses was absolutely convinced that God existed (despite all of the gods the Egyptians recognized and served) and that God would reward those who sought Him. Furthermore, this passage indicates that Moses viewed seeking God as being even more worthwhile than seeking the pleasures involved with sin (recognizing that they were only temporary)!

### ***Obeded God in leading the people out of Egypt***

As God called to Moses from a burning bush, God told Moses that He wanted to use Moses to deliver the Israelites from the oppression they experienced in Egypt and lead them to the land that was promised to Abraham's descendants (the land of Canaan). Although Moses questioned who he was that he could bring the children of Israel out of Egypt (Exodus 3:11), God assured Moses that He would be with him (verse 12).

After this point, Moses was sent with two miraculous signs from God to Pharaoh in order to demonstrate that God had determined the Israelites should be delivered from Egyptian slavery. However, as Moses came before his grandfather (by adoption), the king of Egypt, performing the signs God had given him to perform, Pharaoh refused to let the people of Israel go. Later, God brought a series of ten plagues upon the land of Egypt through Moses because of Pharaoh's stubbornness.

After the final plague was performed (the death of every firstborn child in Egypt among houses that did not have the sign for the Passover), the

Israelites left the land of Egypt. However, as they left, Pharaoh's heart was hardened and pursued them with his army. Then, whenever the Israelites came upon the banks of the Red Sea with Pharaoh's army closing in, God worked the miracle through Moses to part the Sea – allowing the Israelites to go through on dry ground and destroyed the Egyptian army.

Thus, Hebrews 11 speaks further about the faith of Moses. "By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king; for he endured as seeing Him who is invisible. By faith he kept the Passover and the sprinkling of blood, lest he who destroyed the firstborn should touch them. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land, whereas the Egyptians, attempting to do so, were drowned" (verses 27-29). Surely, such an act against a powerful army and king would result in great devastation without God. But, Moses trusted in God even in doing the "impossible." He trusted that God existed and that God would reward those who diligently sought Him.

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## **Joshua**

Joshua sought God in his life. As we read the Biblical record of this man's life, he is among those cheering us toward victory in our race to seek God. Therefore, let's take a few moments to learn some valuable lessons from Joshua.

### ***Trusted in God when others did not***

God had promised to give the land of Canaan to the descendants of Abraham. And, after the descendants of Abraham (the Israelites) had escaped Egyptian captivity, they were brought to the doorstep of their inheritance. God commanded Moses to send twelve spies into the land of Canaan in order to see what the land was like and what the people of the land were like. Among these twelve spies were Joshua and Caleb.

In Numbers 13, the spies were sent into Canaan. And, when they returned to their people, they all reported that the land was magnificent, the people of the land were strong, and the cities were large and well-protected. However, the interpretation of those same facts differed among the twelve. Ten of the spies told the Israelites, "We are not able to go up against the people, for they are stronger than we"



(verse 31). However, Joshua and Caleb gave a different kind of report. Caleb said, “Let us go up at once and take possession, for we are well able to overcome it” (verse 30). Later, Joshua and Caleb urged the people not to rebel against the Lord, claiming that if the Lord delighted in them, He would bring them into the land and give it to them (Numbers 14:7-9).

So, what was it that was different in Joshua and Caleb than was present in the other ten spies? They saw the same things. But, their conclusions were not the same. The ten spies saw the physical strength and feared the people. However, Joshua and Caleb saw the physical strength of the people and feared God! They recognized that the God they were seeking was far stronger than any person or group of people. And, they knew that if they sought after God, He would keep His promises and reward them!

### ***Obedied God in leading Israel into the land of promise***

Unfortunately, the people of Israel sided with the ten faithless spies. Consequently, all of the people twenty years old and above would die in the wilderness, never being brought into the land of Canaan (Numbers 14:28-29). The only exceptions would be Joshua and Caleb (Numbers 14:30). These two would play key roles in the later generation of the Israelites coming in and taking possession of the land. Particularly, Joshua was chosen by God to be the leader who would succeed Moses in bringing the Israelites into the land of Canaan.

As you read the book of Joshua, you learn about the conquest of the land God had promised to Abraham’s descendants. And, you learn about the great faith and obedience of Joshua. For instance, the first city of the land across the Jordan River the Israelites came to possess was the city of Jericho. This was a well-fortified city, but the Israelites (by placing their trust in God) had this city delivered to them whenever they faithfully obeyed God’s instructions to march around the city and blow the trumpets. Hebrews 11:30 says, “By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were encircled for seven days.” Although this is just one example, Joshua and the Israelites demonstrated their faith in God and in His promise to reward those who diligently sought Him.

Then, prior to Joshua’s death, Joshua continued to encourage the people of Israel to seek

God. He challenged them to remember the things God had done for them and determine to serve the Lord. For instance, Joshua 24:15 records the following statement of Joshua to the people: “And if seems evil to you to serve the Lord, choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve, whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the River, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell. But as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord.” Regardless of what the others would choose, Joshua and his family would serve God!

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## David

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David sought God in his life. As we read the Biblical record of this man’s life, he is among those cheering us toward victory in our race to seek God. Therefore, let’s take a few moments to learn some valuable lessons from David.

### ***Trusted in God***

As Saul was rejected by God as king over the Israelites, God searched for another man to be king. Specifically, 1 Samuel 13:14 says that the “Lord has sought for Himself a man after His own heart, and the Lord has commanded him to be commander over His people.” As you continue to read the account given, you discover quickly that this man after God’s own heart was David (see Acts 13:22).

This heart was repeatedly demonstrated throughout David’s life. Through David, you can see a man who was dedicated to following God’s ways (though he was not perfect). You can see his trust and dependence upon God (i.e. as demonstrated frequently in the Psalms). Then, as you read the Biblical record of David’s life, the fact that he trusted in God is made very evident in the story of David and Goliath in 1 Samuel 17.

Goliath was a giant and a champion warrior among the Philistines. And, whenever the Philistines were challenging the Israelites, they issued a challenge for Israel to select one of their men to go against Goliath. The victor would result in his nation being master over the other. But, there was no one in Israel who would answer this challenge – until David volunteered. David was assured that God would deliver Goliath into his hand (see verse 37). So, full

of faith in God, David went into battle against this well armed giant with only a sling and five smooth stones. Yet, he emerged from the battle victorious! David fully trusted in God and knew that God rewards those who diligently seek Him.

### ***Sought forgiveness of his sin with Bathsheba***

Unlike the examples we have been studying up to this point, I now want us to focus on a time in David's life when he did not seek God first in his life. But, I want to do this so that we can focus on how he renewed himself to seek after God and how he found forgiveness.

In 2 Samuel 11, David was on the roof of his house and saw Bathsheba (who was described as a very beautiful woman) bathing. After this, David inquired about the woman. However, when he discovered that she was a married woman (the wife of Uriah), he still had her brought to him and committed adultery with her. After this sin, David discovered that Bathsheba was pregnant with his child. And, after some failed attempts to conceal his sin, David had Bathsheba's husband placed in a situation he would be killed.

Clearly, this man had sinned against God. He sought his own personal desires above the desires of God at this time. However, David's subsequent repentance demonstrates a man who sought God. He did not allow his sin to continue pulling him into a life of more and more sinful activity. Instead, he turned his life around. After realizing the sin he had committed against God, David confessed, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12:13). Then, you could read Psalm 51 and observe how David sought God by pleading for God's forgiveness.

## **Josiah**

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Josiah sought God in his life. As we read the Biblical record of this man's life, he is among those cheering us toward victory in our race to seek God. Therefore, let's take a few moments to learn some valuable lessons from Josiah.

### ***Humbled himself before the Lord***

Josiah was eight years old whenever he became king over Judah and would reign for 31 years (2 Kings 22:1). Many other kings before him had been wicked and refused to seek God. As a result, those who had been God's people in Judah were not practicing what God commanded them. Instead, there were even many idols that had been erected throughout the land.

However, Josiah is described in 2 Kings 22:2 by the following: "And he did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of his father David; he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left." For instance, whenever Josiah was king, the book containing the law of God was found in the house of the Lord (2 Kings 22:3-20). This law was then read and brought before the king and read in his presence. After reading the words of the book, Josiah recognized that the people had not been keeping God's commandments and that there were consequences promised for their rebellion. However, because Josiah's heart was "tender" and he humbled himself before the Lord, the Lord promised that these consequences would not happen while Josiah was king (see 2 Kings 22:18-20).

### ***Obeded God's instructions***

After learning of the instructions of God, Josiah began making sweeping restorations in Judah. He made numerous attempts to bring the nation that was not pleasing to God to a point that it did please Him. In fact, 2 Kings 23:3 says, "Then the king stood by a pillar and made a covenant before the Lord, to follow the Lord and to keep His commandments and His testimonies and His statues, with all his heart and all his soul, to perform the words of this covenant that were written in this book. And all the people took a stand for the covenant."

As the chapter continues, we watch as Josiah commanded all of the articles for idols to be brought out of God's temple and burned outside of Jerusalem. Idolatrous priests were removed and even killed. Idols were destroyed throughout the land. And, he even restored the observance of the Passover in Judah.

Consider how 2 Chronicles 34:33 describes the work of Josiah. "Thus Josiah removed all the abominations from all the country that belonged to the children of Israel, and made all who were present

in Israel diligently serve the Lord their God. All his days they did not depart from following the Lord God of their fathers.” Therefore, Josiah trusted that God existed – and took whatever steps were necessary in order to diligently seek this God who promised to reward them for so doing.

## Paul

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Paul sought God in his life. As we read the Biblical record of this man’s life, he is among those cheering us toward victory in our race to seek God. Therefore, let’s take a few moments to learn some valuable lessons from Paul.

### ***Turned to the Lord***

Prior to becoming a Christian, Paul was called “Saul” – and persecuted those who followed Jesus Christ. Still, his zeal for seeking God is seen at this time. In Acts 22:3-5, Paul spoke of his training under the Jewish teacher Gamaliel. He was taught according to the strictness of the sect of the Pharisees (the strictest sect in the Jewish faith at that time). He said that he was even so “zealous toward God” that he persecuted the Way (Christianity) “to the death” and bound Christians in prison. Indeed, Paul was absolutely convinced that he must do these things contrary to the name of Jesus Christ in order to seek God (see Acts 26:9-11).

However, Paul later recognized that his zeal for God and his attempts to serve God in good conscience (see Acts 23:1) had not been pleasing to God. Whenever Jesus appeared to Paul while Paul was traveling to Damascus with the intent of persecuting Christians there, he became convinced that Jesus Christ is truly the Son of God and the Messiah (see Acts 9). Then, according to the instructions given to him, he was baptized for the forgiveness of his sins (see Acts 9:18 and Acts 22:16).

Now, please appreciate the fact that Paul’s conversion from persecutor of Christians to being a Christian was not without cost. This decision would certainly impact his standing in the Jewish community. And, all the years of Paul’s training and his excellence in the Pharisaic sect would drastically be impacted by his decision to serve Jesus Christ. Yet, Paul determined that he had not been seeking

God according to the way of truth and determined that seeking God was more important than anything else in this life!

### ***Committed his life fully to Christ***

After Paul became a Christian by being baptized for the forgiveness of his sins, he lived a life of faithful obedience and service to God. Also being made an apostle of Jesus Christ, God would use Paul to teach the gospel of Jesus Christ throughout a great portion of this world. However, this great work Paul accomplished would not be without its share of difficulties.

In fact, Paul went from being the persecutor of Christians to being persecuted as a Christian. You could read 2 Corinthians 11:22-33 to observe many of the things Paul endured in his life as a child of God. This included shipwreck, imprisonment, beatings, hunger, thirst, frequent dangers, a stoning, etc. However, despite all of these things he was experiencing as a Christian, he endured. He did so because he had confidence in the salvation God had promised to those who seek Him diligently (see 2 Timothy 1:12 and 2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Listen to Galatians 2:20, as Paul states the commitment he had made to serving Jesus Christ as Lord in his life. “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.” Paul’s life was not about seeking his own desires anymore. Instead, Paul’s life was fully committed to seeking God!

## Conclusion

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As we run our races on this earth, we are encouraged to seek God as we press toward the “finish line” by these (and many other) examples. Their examples have been preserved for us so that we might learn from and be encouraged by them. Therefore, through considering their examples, it is my hope that you have a greater appreciation of what it means to seek God (as we discussed in lesson 3).

But, are you willing to commit yourself to seeking God in this same kind of way as these? Will you determine to seek God first in your life regardless of how others around you choose to live?

Or, will you only partially choose to seek Him or seek Him in a way He does not desire to be sought? Please recognize that God only promises to reward those who diligently seek Him – as demonstrated in the examples we have studied during this lesson.

## Study Question

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What is the “cloud of witnesses” referenced in Hebrews 12:1? How should it help us seek God?

### 1. Noah

Discuss how Noah lived a life that was different from the world.

Discuss Noah’s obedience to the instructions God had given him.

### 2. Abraham

Discuss Abraham’s obedience in leaving his homeland.

Discuss Abraham’s obedience in sacrificing his son.

### 3. Moses

Discuss Moses’ choice to associate himself with the people of God rather than with the Egyptians.

Discuss Moses’ obedience in leading the people of God out of Egypt.

### 4. Joshua

Discuss Joshua’s trust in God when others did not trust God.

Discuss Joshua’s obedience in leading Israel to the land of promise.

### 5. David

Discuss how David trusted in God.

Discuss how David sought forgiveness after his sin with Bathsheba.

### 6. Josiah

Discuss how Josiah humbled himself before the Lord.

Discuss how Josiah obeyed God’s instructions.

### 7. Paul

Discuss how Paul turned to the Lord.

Discuss how he gave his life to Christ.

Seeking God

# Lesson 5:

# How To Seek God

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Seeking God is central to living a life that is pleasing to God. During this series of lessons, we have explored some fundamental points concerning the God we should be seeking, why we should be seeking after this God, what it means to seek God, and considered examples of some who have sought God. Now, before proceeding in this study, we need to spend our time focusing on how it is that we seek after God.

We have already seen that we should “seek those things that are above” (Colossians 3:1). This involves setting our minds on things above, not on things on the earth (Colossians 3:2). We must, in the language of Jesus in Matthew 6:33, “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.” But, how do we know how to accomplish any of this?

Let’s take a moment to learn from something said in Deuteronomy 4. Moses has been instructing the Israelite nation that was preparing to go into the land of Canaan to be obedient to God. And, he prophetically warned them that there would be consequences if they failed to do so. For instance, in verses 25-28, Moses said that their descendants would fail to serve God and choose to do evil in God’s sight so as to provoke Him to anger that would result in God punishing the people of Israel. Then,

listen to verses 29-31: “But from there you will seek the Lord your God, and you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the Lord your God and obey His voice (for the Lord your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.”

In this time when God would punish those who would turn away from Him, Moses said that they would choose to seek God and would find Him if they chose to seek Him with their whole hearts and souls. But, notice that they would only be able to seek the Lord in this way if they would turn to Him and *obey His voice!* Yes, God is a merciful God who offers forgiveness through Jesus Christ to those who will listen to Him!

Therefore, as you consider how it is that you should seek after God during the course of your life, you need to put your focus on listening to God. For, it is simply unreasonable to believe that you can seek God by living your life in just any way you choose to live. Instead, if you truly desire to seek after God, you will want to listen to what He has said He expects from you! So, this lesson will focus on learning how God tells us to seek after Him. We will be considering how God has revealed His will to mankind, how to become one of His followers, and how to live as one of His followers.

## Seek God Through Obeying His Word

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How is it that mankind can even know the will of the Almighty God so as to seek Him through it? To begin, let’s revisit something Paul told the people of Athens in Acts 17:30-31. In God’s full authority as Lord of heaven and earth, He will “judge the world in righteousness” by Jesus Christ one Day. And, in His authority, He also can use whatever standard/criteria He chooses. Fortunately for mankind, God has revealed that standard to us before the Judgment so that we can live our lives according to it and be prepared for that Day! This standard/criteria is simply His word/His will.

## ***God has instructed us through His written word***

But, how has the God who is Lord of heaven and earth chosen to reveal His will to mankind? Certainly, He has communicated His will to mankind in various ways throughout time. Sometimes, He directly spoke to individuals (i.e. like He did with Adam, Noah, Abraham, etc.). Sometimes, He communicated with individuals through dreams (i.e. like He did with Joseph, Peter, etc.). Sometimes, He communicated His will through the Holy Spirit directing individuals (i.e. like He did to the prophets and apostles – who would tell others the things they had been told). At one time, He communicated His will to the nation of Israel through the Law He revealed to Moses. At one time, He communicated His will to people through Jesus Christ living on earth and directly teaching the people He interacted with. The Bible contains many examples of how God has revealed His will throughout the millennia.

Yet, the question for us remains: How is it that God communicates His will to mankind today? There is a problem. As Romans 11:34 asks, “For who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has become His counselor?” Isaiah 55:8-9 says, “‘For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,’ says the Lord. ‘For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.’” So, we simply could not know what God’s will is unless He has (in some way) made it known to us.

Let’s consider the picture of the Day God will judge the world given in Revelation 20:11-15, as it reveals something about the standard God will use to judge us. “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.”

Notice that everyone who will stand before the God and Judge of this world will be judged according to what they have done, by the things which were written “in the books.” These books are *not* the Book of Life that is identified in this text. Instead, the Book of Life is God’s book that records all the names of those who will spend eternity in Heaven. Rather, the books all people will be judged by are the books that contain the words of God. For instance, Jesus said, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges Him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48).

But, how can we know these words? Yes, God has communicated His will to mankind in various ways (as previously demonstrated). But, according to Hebrews 1:1-2, God has “spoken to us by His Son.” Jesus said that the things He spoke were according to the authority of the Father (John 12:49 and Matthew 28:18). Yet, Jesus does not live on the earth so as to directly communicate with us any longer. How, then, does God’s Son speak to us today? Jesus told His apostles that the Father would send the Holy Spirit to them after He departed from this earth. And, the Holy Spirit would teach them all things, even bringing them to remembrance of what Jesus had said while He was with them (see John 14:25-26). In addition, Jesus said that the Holy Spirit would guide them “into all truth” – including truths they could not grasp while He was with them (John 16:12-13). Jesus said the Holy Spirit would glorify Him by taking what was His and declaring it to them (John 16:14).

The Holy Spirit was uniquely qualified to accomplish this work. 1 Corinthians 2:9 says that “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, Nor have entered into the heart of man The things which God has prepared for those who love Him.” Then, verse 10 says, “But God has revealed them to us through His Spirit. For the Spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God.” Listen to verse 16: “For ‘who has known the mind of the Lord that he may instruct Him?’ But we have the mind of Christ.” So, it is through the words revealed by God’s Holy Spirit that we can know what is in the mind of Christ – who speaks with the authority given to Him by the Father! Ephesians 3:3-5 demonstrates that we can understand God’s plan of salvation whenever we read the words that have been revealed by the Holy Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets (who recorded that message in written form).

These words are recorded in the pages of the Bible. Specifically, the words we have been given to obey today are the words that are recorded in the pages of the New Testament. Jesus Christ nailed the old Law (contained in the pages of the Old Testament) to His cross (see Colossians 2:14). So, we live under His new and better law that is recorded in the pages of the New Testament. This is God's perfect law that identifies how we can be made free from sin (James 1:25)!

### ***The need for obedience***

Having had the instructions of our holy God given to us, the only way we can be pleasing to Him and seek Him is if we will obey His instructions (more than just believing that He exists and that His Son died for us). 2 Timothy 3:16-17 says that "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God." That is, all the words recorded in the pages of the Bible are from God. They are not merely the ideas or suggestions of man. They are from the eternally wise God who will judge the world in righteousness one Day by Jesus Christ. And, because He is a fair and righteous God, they are the words that are profitable for "doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work." That is, these words from God tell us exactly what we need to believe, how we need to correct our lives, and what He expects us to do in order to please and seek Him! You will find no other book that perfectly leads you to live for God besides the Bible!

Surely, then, we must obey these words in order to live in the way that pleases God. The Scriptures repeatedly demonstrate this to be so. For instance, Hebrews 5:9 says that Jesus Christ "became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him." As we discussed in lesson 3, hearing the words God has instructed is not sufficient to pleasing God. We must be "doers of the word" (James 1:22)! In fact, recall what we learned in lesson 2 from 2 Thessalonians 1:8-9. Paul states that those who "do not know God" and "those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ" are the ones who will experience God's vengeance and be "punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

### ***What is obedience?***

Yes, obedience to God's word (as revealed in the pages of the Bible) is absolutely essential to seeking God. But, what exactly does true obedience look like? As we have considered in another lesson, 1 John 5:3 says that the love of God is to "keep His commandments" and that His "commandments are not burdensome."

So, we must do what He tells us to do – in the way He tells us to do it. And, we must not consider doing His commandments a burdensome task. Therefore, just going through the motions of serving God without finding joy in doing what He says is not pleasing to God or true and faithful obedience. Furthermore, it is not obedience whenever you fail to do what God has said, even though you may be sincere about what you have done. True obedience requires both of these things.

### ***Hold fast the pattern!***

Before moving on in this study, let's take a moment to consider the subject of Bible authority. As we studied in lesson 1, God is Lord (Master) of heaven and earth. Therefore, He possesses all authority. Now, we have been learning how that God (the Father) gave His Son (Jesus Christ) all authority. Then, Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would be sent to speak the things of Jesus. He did so whenever He inspired the apostles and prophets to write the words recorded in the Bible. Therefore, the Bible is a book that truly does contain the words of God and is fully authoritative. In fact, as I have mentioned, it is the only book that perfectly leads us into the righteous ways of God.

We must learn the need, then, to have Bible authority for everything that we do in life. Colossians 3:17 says, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him." Since Jesus has been given all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18), everything we do and everything we say must be done in the name of Jesus Christ, our Lord! To do everything in His name is to do everything by His authority. So, if we choose to do something the Scriptures do not approve (i.e. that is outside of the authority Jesus Christ has given), we cannot please God. This applies to how we live our individual lives, to how we conduct ourselves in our families, to how

we conduct ourselves in business, to how local churches function and operate, etc.

But, how can we do all things in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ? I believe 2 Timothy 1:13 offers the answer. In this God-inspired text, Paul told Timothy, “Hold fast the pattern of sound words which you have heard from me, in faith and love which are in Christ Jesus.” The words that have been written in the pages of the Bible are a pattern – a pattern for making lives that please God. Therefore, these words are “sound” (incorrupt, healthy, pure). There is no element of evil in them at all that will work to destroy your soul. Recognizing this, we must choose to hold fast to that pattern of sound words in every of area of life and refuse to act in a way that does not have Bible authority! The only way we can have Bible authority for a thing is to have a direct command, an approved example, or a necessary inference given within the pattern of sound words (contained in the New Testament Scriptures).

## Becoming Christians

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We cannot seek God without His word. We simply would not know where to begin. Thanks be to God that He has revealed His perfect word to us. Now, we must be obedient to His written word in order to be saved from our sins. But, just what does God’s word tell us to do in order to be forgiven of the sins we have all committed (as we discussed in lesson 2)? Let’s spend some time now investigating the pattern of sound words for becoming followers of God (i.e. Christians).

### **Hear God’s word**

It is only through a study of God’s word that you can understand what God has done for you and what God has instructed you to do to be saved! You can read Romans 10:13-18 and observe the importance of hearing the word of God – as it demonstrates that each individual must hear the word of God in order to be saved.

In Matthew 17:5, God (the Father) instructed that we hear (or, listen) to His Son (Jesus Christ). Today, as we have discussed, we do this by hearing the words recorded in the pages of the New Testament. In Acts 18:8, the Corinthians heard the word of God which was preached to them and,

therefore, were able to believe and take the necessary steps of obedience (baptism is specifically identified in the passage).

Notice Romans 10:17: “So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Hearing the word of God leads an individual to faith (which we discussed as a necessary element involved in seeking God in lesson 3). You will not develop saving faith by hearing the doctrines or opinions of man. It is only developed through hearing God’s word! Therefore, you need to carefully evaluate God’s word, studying it daily (Acts 17:10-11), so that you can know what God says you must do!

Think about it. If you don’t hear what God has done for you so that you can be saved or what He has commanded you to do in order to be saved, how can you be saved? The simple fact is that you won’t be! You must hear God’s word. However, please understand that you do not need to hear everything that the Bible teaches in order to begin developing saving faith. Yet, you do need to hear about God, the consequences of sin, the life, death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, and the gospel’s plan of salvation. It is only *after* you hear the Bible’s teachings about these things that you can obey God and have your sins forgiven!

### **Believe**

Recall that Hebrews 11:6 plainly states that is “impossible” to please God without faith. We must both believe that God exists and that He rewards those who diligently seek Him. Jesus also said, “Therefore I said to you that you will die in your sins; for if you do not believe that I am He, you will die in your sins” (John 8:24). We must believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God who came to earth, lived as man, died the horrible death on the cross, was buried in the tomb, and rose from the dead – so that we could be saved from our sins!

As we discussed in lesson 3, Hebrews 11:1 teaches us that faith “is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.” Faith is the proper trust that we place in God’s reality and in the reality of His promises. True faith begins with the mental acknowledgement of certain things as being true – but it does not end there! As we have studied, Hebrews 11 offers examples of faith. I encourage you to read this chapter that discusses faith and notice that it shows an active, obedient faith (not



merely mental acknowledgement regarding certain facts as being true)! For instance, the faith of Abel caused him to offer an acceptable sacrifice. The faith of Noah caused him to prepare an ark. The faith of Abraham caused him to obey God's command to offer his only son upon an altar. So it goes throughout the chapter. Faith leads to action, which results in being pleasing to God!

Yet, many religious organizations teach that faith (a mental conviction of certain facts) is the *only* requirement for salvation (i.e. "Just believe in Jesus"). However, we are ***not*** interested in what various "church doctrines" teach. Rather, we are concerned about what God teaches! James 2:14-26 teaches some important things applicable to the false concept of "faith only." We'll explore this passage in greater detail in lesson 6. So, for now, just consider the statement made in verse 24: "You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only." Clearly, the doctrine of "faith only" is not Bible doctrine and will not help us seek God (as we'll explore further in lesson 6). There are other things that God has required of us.

Although "faith only" is not sufficient for salvation, God has absolutely declared faith to be essential. And, particularly, John 8:24 demonstrated that we must mentally acknowledge the truth that Jesus Christ is the Son of God. Without this belief, we cannot be forgiven of our sins. But, we have not met all of God's requirements for salvation at this point.

## **Repent**

Jesus clearly stated the importance and necessity of repentance in Luke 13:3, 5: "I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish...I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish." In response to the question, "what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37), Peter identified two things in Acts 2:38: "Then Peter said to them, 'Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.'" One of these is repentance. Therefore, repentance is necessary in order to be forgiven of your sins.

Repentance is an acknowledgement of your past sins and a determination to put off those sins. In repentance, you are imitating Christ's death. You are not dying physically or being physically crucified; but, you are putting the old man of sin to death! In

putting the old man of sin to death, you are making way for the new man (which is patterned after God's holiness)! Colossians 3:1-17 is helpful to understand this concept. The life of a Christian is a changed life – with changed affections (Colossians 3:1-4). The old man of sin has been put to death (a list of some things that are to be put to death is given in Colossians 3:5-11). Then, the new man is put on, being renewed in knowledge, according to the image of the one who created Him (a list of some things that are to be put on is given in Colossians 3:12-17).

Furthermore, Acts 17:30-31 answers the question, "who must repent?": "Truly, these times of ignorance God overlooked, but now commands all men everywhere to repent, because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." Quite simply, God has commanded that all mankind everywhere must repent! Everyone who has sinned must turn from that sin and live for God in order to be pleasing to Him! Remember, sin has separated us from the God we should be seeking. Therefore, we must turn away from our sin in order that we can live in the way God approves!

## **Confess Christ**

Jesus says that those who will confess Him before men, He will confess before His Father; and those who deny Him before men, He will deny before His Father (Matthew 10:32-33). Paul also says that a confession is necessary for salvation in Romans 10:9-10: "that if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For with the heart one believes unto righteousness, and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation."

This confession is *not* a confession of your sins. Rather, this is a confession that acknowledges your faith in the Lord Jesus Christ (Romans 10:9). The Ethiopian eunuch provides us with an example of such a confession. Notice how this man made this confession after he was taught the gospel of Jesus Christ – and before he was baptized. Acts 8:35-37 says, "Then Philip opened his mouth, and beginning at this Scripture, preached Jesus to him. Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being baptized?' Then Philip said, 'If you believe with all your heart, you may.' And he

answered and said, ‘I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.’”

## ***Be baptized***

While most religious organizations do not teach that baptism is *necessary* (required) for salvation, the word of God teaches that it is! Please consider each of the following passages for yourself. Do not allow any preconceived ideas or other religious teaching to hinder your understanding of these passages.

In Mark 16:16, Jesus clearly couples belief and baptism with salvation. He said: “He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned.” Ask yourself the question, “Who does Jesus say will be saved?” Clearly, it is the one who believes and is baptized. However, simply failing to believe will lead to your eternal condemnation.

In Acts 2:37-38, Peter responds to the question of his audience by stating that both repentance and baptism are necessary in order to have sins forgiven: “Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, ‘Men and brethren, what shall we do?’ Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” Ask yourself, “Can I be saved without having my sins forgiven?” If not, what does Peter say must be done in order to have your sins forgiven? He clearly says that repentance and baptism are necessary.

In 1 Peter 3:20-21, Peter says that baptism saves us (just as Noah and his family were saved by water): “who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype [corresponding to the example of Noah] which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.” Did you catch that? Peter said that baptism “now saves us.” Don’t let anyone tell you that baptism does *not* save you!

In Galatians 3:26-27, Paul says that we are baptized into Christ: “For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ.” Why

is it important to be “in Christ”? Romans 6:23 and 2 Timothy 2:10 both show that salvation is located “in Christ.” Now, you must consider that Galatians 3:27 teaches that baptism is what puts us in Christ – where salvation is! So, how can you be saved without being baptized into Christ? You simply cannot be!

In Acts 22:16, Saul (later known as the apostle Paul) was told to be baptized and that this would accomplish the washing away of his sins: “And now why are you waiting? Arise and be baptized, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord.” Again, ask yourself, “Can I be saved without having my sins washed away?” According to the things we studied in lesson 4, the answer is a resounding, “No!” So, if you cannot be saved while you are still in your sins, you must have them “washed away” (forgiven). God says (here in Acts 22:16) that baptism is necessary for that to happen! Also, God says that baptism is involved in “calling on the name of the Lord” (which is also said to be necessary for salvation in Romans 10:13).

But, what does God’s word teach us about the method/mode of baptism? “Baptism” is practiced in various ways in the religious world. Some immerse. Some sprinkle or pour water over the head of the individual. But, what is the truth? The word God’s Holy Spirit inspired the writers of the New Testament to use whenever He instructed “baptism” means to “immerse” – and does not mean sprinkling or pouring! Then, not only does the word that is used teach us about the acceptable mode/method of baptism; but, the Bible also contains additional passages that help us understand its meaning.

Matthew 3:16 says that Jesus “came up immediately from the water” after He was baptized. Acts 8:38-39 shows the preacher (Philip) and the student (the Ethiopian eunuch) both going down into the water, Philip baptizing the eunuch, and both coming up from the water: “So he commanded the chariot to stand still. And both Philip and the eunuch went down into the water, and he baptized him. Now when they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught Philip away, so that the eunuch saw him no more; and he went on his way rejoicing.”

Romans 6:3-4 plainly says that we are buried in baptism: “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even

so we also should walk in newness of life.” Certainly burial is a complete covering, not a sprinkling or pouring!

So, only immersion is acceptable to accomplish God’s command known as “baptism.” The practices of sprinkling or pouring water over someone’s head simply does not fulfill God’s command to be baptized (immersed)! In being baptized, the Scriptures teach that you are forgiven of your sins, put on Christ, and are saved. If you have not been baptized in this way or for these reasons, you have not fulfilled God’s command to be baptized.

## Living As Christians

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After being obedient to the things that God has commanded (as we have discussed), you become a child of God (a Christian). You can rejoice because your sins have been forgiven (Acts 8:39). You have now been reconciled to God and have gained access to all the spiritual blessings that are in Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:3). Additionally, you have been added to the church of Christ – the body of the saved (see Acts 2:37-47). But, your responsibilities to seeking God through His word do not end at this point. Instead, you have been given the responsibility to live faithfully to Jesus Christ throughout your earthly life in order to receive the eternal home with God in Heaven (see Revelation 2:10). Therefore, take just a moment to consider what it means to live as a Christian.

### ***Newness of life***

Our lives (as Christians) must be transformed lives. Listen again to Romans 6:3-4. “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.”

Though we once lived for sin and unrighteousness, we now live new lives for God. Therefore, we must (in the language of Colossians 3), put to death the sinful things we have been involved in. Whenever we repented, we determined to turn away from them. Now, we must produce the

fruits of repentance – a life that no longer lives for those same sinful things. Instead, we must only be living our lives in order to do things God approves.

### ***Continued obedience***

In all areas of our lives, we must be searching diligently to hold fast to God’s word as a pattern. We must look to His word to transform our thoughts, our words, and our actions. We must have a burning desire to get away from everything that is evil and cling closely to everything that is good. And, the only way that we can accomplish this is if we put everything we do, think, and say to the test. 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 says, “Test all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil.” The standard for all things to be tested by must be God’s pattern (His word)!

And, once again, we do not do this grudgingly. Instead, we do this joyfully (as we discussed from 1 John 5:3). We should gladly live our lives for the one who gave Himself for us so that we could be saved eternally (see 2 Corinthians 5:14-15)! Recall (from lesson 2), that Jesus Christ did not die for us so that we could continue living for our sins. Rather, He died for us so that He could “redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (Titus 2:14)! Therefore, we must search the Scriptures diligently and make zealous application of the things we read.

### ***Local church membership***

While there are many specifics involved in living as a Christian (much of the New Testament is devoted to this subject), we should also consider the importance of being a member of a local church of Christ. Whenever an individual becomes a Christian (by obeying the commandments we have already discussed), God automatically adds that individual to the church of Christ (see Acts 2). However, His word also teaches the importance of being a member of a local church of Christ that follows the pattern of sound words in the pages of the New Testament.

As you read the book of Acts and the letters that were written to Christians throughout the New Testament, you should observe the fact that there were many local churches of Christ (Romans 16:16). These local churches were composed of individual Christians who had joined themselves together for the purpose of working and worshiping together in a

local geographic area. As a Christian, God wants you to join yourself (if possible) to a local church of Christ that faithfully follows His pattern. He designed the local church to be a base of fellowship and strength that is greater than the individual Christian. Through the local church, there is encouragement offered to Christians that helps them continue to live a life of faithfulness to God, there is a collective work that is done to teach others the gospel of Jesus Christ, and there is benevolent help offered to Christians who are in need. I encourage you to search the Scriptures and discover even more about the pattern God has revealed concerning the role of the local church and how it benefits the Christian!

## Conclusion

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Please recognize that the God we will be judged by has revealed His will to us. We can learn about His will by reading the words the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles and prophets to write (i.e. found in the pages of the New Testament). And, these are the only words that lead us to live lives that are fully pleasing to God.

So, have you been obedient to God's word? Have you become a Christian by hearing His word, believing in Jesus Christ, repenting of your sins, confessing Jesus Christ, and being immersed in water for the forgiveness of your sins? If not, you are not seeking God. Then, if you have obeyed these commandments of God, are you continuing to live a life of faithful obedience? If not, you have stopped seeking God. Please choose today that you will seek God by being obedient to the instructions of God in His word!

## Study Questions

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What can you learn about seeking God from Deuteronomy 4:29-31?

### 1. Seek God Through Obeying His Word

How has God communicated with mankind in the past – and how does He communicate with us today?

Why do you need to obey God?

What is true obedience?

What is the importance of having Bible authority for everything you do in life?

### 2. Becoming Christians

Is hearing God's Word necessary for salvation? What does hearing the Word of God lead to?

Is faith necessary for salvation? What is faith? Is "faith only" sufficient for salvation?

Is repentance necessary for salvation? What is repentance?

Is a confession necessary for salvation? What confession must be made?

Is baptism necessary for salvation? What is baptism?

### **3. Living As Christians**

Should your life be different after becoming a Christian than it was prior to becoming a Christian? Explain.

Do you have a responsibility to continue to be obedient to God now that you are a Christian?

What is a local church – and why is it important to be a member of a local church of Christ that is faithful to God?

# Lesson 6: False Ideas About Seeking God

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Seeking God is central to living a life that is pleasing to God. Unfortunately, there are many people who claim to seek God in their lives who remain the enemies of God because they are not actually seeking Him by being obedient to His word. Instead, they are trying to seek Him in other ways that seem better to themselves.

However, we should remember the Scripture that was introduced in lesson 5 that said God’s thoughts and ways are much higher than ours (see Isaiah 55:8-9). In fact, Jeremiah 10:23 reveals that it is not “in man who walks to direct his own steps.” That is, it is outside of man’s ability to seek God by living in just any way that seems right to him. Listen to Proverbs 14:12: “There is a way that seems right to a man, But its end is the way of death.”

Yes, God has promised that we will find Him if we seek Him (see Matthew 7:7-8). However, He has not promised that we will find Him if we refuse to seek Him in the way He desires to be sought! In fact, the Scriptures record examples of individuals who appeared as if they were seeking God. But, they

were not truly seeking Him because they were not seeking Him according to His instructions. Consider two examples.

First, consider the Jews. Many of the Jewish people rejected Jesus Christ. Therefore, they could not possibly be seeking God when they rejected the Messiah (Christ) the Law and the Prophets had been foretelling. In Romans 10:2-3, Paul wrote concerning them: “For I bear them witness that they have a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge. For they being ignorant of God’s righteousness, and seeking to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted to the righteousness of God.” They were zealous for God and they wanted righteousness. However, they sought being right with God their own way rather than God’s! They rejected the proper actions that true knowledge of God’s word would have led them to. Still, these individuals likely lived according to many of the instructions God had given in the Old Law. But, though they appeared to be seeking God, they were not actually drawing near to Him.

Second, consider those who sought Jesus in John 6. At the beginning of John 6, Jesus performed the miracle of feeding the five thousand men (plus women and children) with five loaves and two small fish. After Jesus departed from them, the multitude is said to have been “seeking Jesus” the next day (see verse 25). But, when Jesus was asked why He had come to that place, He answered them, “Most assuredly, I say to you, you seek Me, not because you saw the signs, but because you ate of the loaves and were filled. Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him” (verses 26-27). These people, therefore, sought Jesus – but they did so for the wrong reasons!

Although other examples could certainly be provided, these illustrate the basic fact that there have been people who have had false ideas about seeking God in the past. And, I firmly believe the Scriptures teach that there will always be individuals who seek Him in ways that fail to please Him. Therefore, this sixth lesson is dedicated to exploring five popular false ideas about seeking God. Now, before we begin, please understand that these are not the only ways an individual can falsely seek God. Certainly, there are many false ways people try to seek God that are outside of what is called

“Christianity.” However, all of these are false (at least) because they fail to be reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. In this study, we are going to limit our discussion to *some* of the false attempts made within “Christianity.” Now, as we begin this study, please allow yourself to be challenged and honestly evaluate the attempts you have made in your life to seek God. Remember that the God who is Lord of heaven and earth will judge you by His word and will only reward those who seek Him according to what He has revealed therein.

## **“Faith Only Christianity”**

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A large percentage of those who claim to be Christians and claim to be seeking God believe in the doctrine of “faith only.” In fact, this doctrine is the foundation of the majority of so-called protestant “Christian” churches today. However, we need to examine this popular teaching by the Scriptures to see whether it is part of the pattern God has revealed about seeking Him.

### ***What is “faith only Christianity”?***

“Faith only Christianity” is rooted in a doctrine that claims faith is the only thing that is necessary for salvation. They claim that there is nothing that a person must *do* in order to be forgiven of his/her sins. They claim that belief in God and in Jesus Christ is enough to save an individual. So, according to this popular doctrine, at the point an individual mentally accepts the truths about God and Jesus Christ, he/she is saved.

Then, since faith in God and Jesus is the only requirement for salvation, this doctrine claims that other doctrines simply do not matter to an individual’s salvation. Other than the doctrines that are at the “core” of the gospel’s message (i.e. Jesus’ Deity, His virgin birth, His sacrifice, His resurrection, etc.), other doctrines are simply not viewed as being that significant. In fact, adherents to “faith only Christianity” have a wide range of doctrinal beliefs. But, they simply do not view their doctrinal differences as being significant – since they all believe in Jesus.

### ***Why “faith only Christianity” is false***

“Faith only Christianity” is a false attempt at seeking God because it is simply not taught in the Scriptures. Yes, as we have already studied in previous lessons, faith is absolutely essential to seeking God (see Hebrews 11:6). But, “faith only” is contrary to seeking God.

First, recognize that acceptable faith involves more than “faith only.” Hebrews 11 demonstrates this perfectly. In lesson 3, we observed the definition of faith that was given in verse 1. And, we have continued to consider verse 6. Particularly, verse 6 states that in order to have a faith that pleases God, we must believe that He exists and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him. So, true faith is more than just believing God exists. It also believes that He rewards those who diligently seek Him. And, if it truly does believe God rewards those who diligently seek Him, it will also act in obedience to diligently seek God! In fact, the rest of Hebrews 11 demonstrates this exact nature of faith as active and obedient.

Second, God instructs us to *do* something in order to seek Him and become Christians. Go back and review the things we studied in lesson 5. We observed (from the Scriptures) that hearing God’s word, believing in Jesus as the Son of God, repenting of our sins, confessing Jesus as Christ, and being immersed in water are all requirements God has placed upon our salvations. Then, He also instructs that we remain faithful to Him throughout our lives. Now, we do not do these things in order to earn our own salvations. Ephesians 2:8-9 clearly teaches that we cannot do any kind of work to earn our salvations. Instead, whenever we do the things we have been instructed to do, we are simply being obedient to God. So, as Luke 17:10 teaches, whenever we do all that we have been commanded, we recognize that we are still “unprofitable servants,” having only done what was our duty to do!

Third, Jesus taught that it is not enough just to believe in Him and profess allegiance to Him. In Matthew 7:21-23, Jesus said, “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I

never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!” Very clearly, Jesus Christ taught that it was absolutely essential to be obedient to God. And, it was not enough to just profess faith and allegiance to Jesus, while doing some good things. Such a one who did not obey God and engaged in sin (lawlessness) will be eternally separated from God on the Day of Judgment!

Fourth, God’s word tells us that it is essential to abide in the doctrine of Christ. Please recognize that God’s inspired word is a book of doctrine. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 reveals that all Scripture is inspired of God and is profitable for doctrine. Yes, God wants us to learn from His doctrines (teachings) He reveals in the pages of the Bible. And, not only must we learn from them, but we must also hold only to them. 2 John 1:9-11 says, “Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.” To dismiss most Bible doctrines as being unimportant or to accept those who hold to contrary doctrines is to fail to abide in God!

Fifth, “faith only Christianity” is directly opposed in James 2:14-26. Please take some time to read the entire passage – and then consider this brief summary. Verse 14: Can a faith without works save an individual? Verses 15-16: What profit is it, when you observe someone who is naked and without food and only say to such a one, “Go in peace, be warmed and filled,” but do not give him what he was in need of? Verse 17: This is just like faith without works. It does no good and it is dead because it is by itself! Verse 18: Faith is not shown in the absence of works! Instead, faith is shown by works. Faith without works is not a real faith! Verse 19: Even the demons believe and shudder that there is a God (but, the demons are not saved by their belief in God and Christ). Verse 20: Faith without works is useless. Verses 21-23: Abraham was justified by works. Verse 24: You are justified by works (i.e. works of obedience) and *not* by faith only. Notice that this is the only time in the Bible that the phrase “faith only” is used. Verse 25: Rahab was justified by works. Verse 26: Faith without works is dead. Can a dead faith save? Clearly, the doctrine of “faith only” is not Bible doctrine. There are other things that God has required of us. Therefore, “faith only Christianity” is not sufficient in seeking God!

## “Denominational Christianity”

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Today, there are tens of thousands of religious organizations and churches that all claim to be following Jesus Christ. And, these tens of thousands of different (so-called) “Christian” churches teach many different doctrines and practice their “Christianity” differently from the others. These many churches have millions of members who are professing to be Christians and believe that they are seeking God. However, we need to examine this popular religious system in the world by the Scriptures to see whether it is part of the pattern God has revealed about seeking Him.

### ***What is “denominational Christianity”?***

A “denomination” (when used in a religious sense) refers to a church body/organization that exercises authority over local churches. For instance, Southern Baptist, Wesleyan, Lutheran, Presbyterian, United Methodist, etc. are all examples of denominations. There are many local churches in various communities around the world that associate themselves with these church bodies. They possess a governing body and have official church creeds (doctrines).

Although each one of these denominations have been established by a man or a woman, they all claim to be part of Christ’s church. Therefore, many people join these denominations in their attempts to seek God. Thus, they adhere to the doctrines/beliefs of that particular denomination (as decided upon by the governing body of the denomination – i.e. a president, church council, etc.). Perhaps they have even joined the denomination because they were raised in that particular denomination.

### ***Why “denominational Christianity” is false***

“Denominational Christianity” is a false attempt at seeking God because it simply cannot be found in the Scriptures that tell us how to seek God. While it is important to be a member of the church and a local church (as discussed briefly in lesson 5), the denominations were not in existence during the time of the New Testament. And, because they originated with men and do not stand in Bible



doctrine, “denominational Christianity” is contrary to seeking God.

First, Jesus only established one church. Although it is very common to hear folks associated with the denominations say, “Join the church of your own choice because all roads lead to Heaven,” we need to consider what God actually teaches. In Matthew 16:18, Jesus promised, “I will build My church.” Notice the singular nature of that church Jesus would build. And, in Acts 2, we read only about one church coming into existence (see verses 41 and 47). Those who were being added to the church were those who were being saved by obeying the requirements God had placed upon salvation (as discussed in lesson 5). Then, in Ephesians 4:4, Paul said that there is only “one body” (which is the church, Ephesians 1:22-23). Therefore, any other church that came into existence after Christ’s cannot be the one church Jesus established. Only those who are in His church will be saved (see Acts 2:47)!

Second, God has only revealed one faith – and commands unity in that one faith. Along with stating that there is only one body, Paul also stated that there is only “one faith” (Ephesians 4:5). That is, there is only one system of acceptable religious belief, teaching, and practice. Yet, the denominational world claims thousands of ways to believe, teach, and practice “Christianity.” Furthermore, the Scriptures command unity in this faith. Philippians 1:27 commands “that you stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (see also 1 Corinthians 1:10). There is to be no division in the body (church) of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 12:25). How, then, could God be pleased with all the division that has occurred to bring about the thousands of denominations that exist today?

Third, denominations do not stand for the doctrine of Jesus Christ. We have already seen the need to stand firmly in the doctrine of Christ that is revealed in the pages of God’s word (read 2 John 1:9-11 again). However, all of the denominations I am familiar with do not stand firmly in the doctrine of Christ. For instance, a large number of them have adopted the doctrine of “faith only” we have already discussed. Very few of them accurately teach God’s plan of salvation we studied in lesson 5. So, you must consider: How can we seek God if we do not believe the things God wants us to believe and do things in the way God wants us to do them? We simply cannot.

And, the Scriptures have warned us not to follow those who teach false doctrines (see Matthew 7:15-20; Galatians 1:6-9; 2 Peter 2:1-3).

Fourth, denominations have human heads rather than recognizing Christ Jesus as the only Head of the church. Colossians 1:18 says that “He [Jesus] is the head of the body, the church.” The Scriptures teach that He is the only one His church must submit to. However, the denominations have church councils, presidents, etc. who decide what their doctrines will be. And, in doing so, they depart from the doctrine of Christ. Christ has simply never given His headship over the church to any man or group of men. There is absolutely no Bible authority for the denominational arrangement/system to even exist. Therefore, “denominational Christianity” is not sufficient in seeking God.

## **“Conscience-Based Christianity”**

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There are many people today who claim to be Christians and claim to be seeking God who are merely living according to the directions of their own consciences. They believe that God will accept them as long as they seek Him with a clean conscience. However, we need to examine this popular idea by the Scriptures to see whether it is part of the pattern God has revealed about seeking Him.

### ***What is “conscience-based Christianity”?***

“Let your conscience be your guide.” That is what many people claim today – even in religion. They claim that as long as we live according to the directions of our consciences that we will be pleasing to God. The conscience is, therefore, implied as the standard to be used in determining what is “right” and what is “wrong.” This, then, often leads to the development and discussion of “situation ethics” (i.e. what is “right” and “wrong” in particular situations).

Of course, the basis of “conscience-based Christianity” is a belief that there is no absolute standard of “right” and “wrong.” This is “moral relativity.” What is “right” and “wrong” is said to vary from situation to situation and is influenced by a wide number of factors (i.e. how an individual was raised, an individual’s education, the values of

particular cultures, etc.). Thus, what is “right” and “wrong” is said to be subjective and differs from person to person.

### ***Why “conscience-based Christianity” is false***

“Conscience-based Christianity” is a false attempt at seeking God because it fails to recognize God’s word as the complete and objective standard in living life on this earth. While those who try to seek God in this way may claim to believe in and follow the Bible as God’s word, they elevate their own consciences above what God’s word teaches. Therefore, “conscience-based Christianity” is contrary to seeking God.

First, God does recognize that matters of individual conscience exists – and the conscience does matter. Please understand that I am not at all dismissing the importance of the conscience in pleasing God. The Scriptures teach that the conscience does have a role in living to please God. But, we must be careful to keep it in its God-given place. For instance, Romans 14 is a chapter that discusses matters of Christian liberty. These are things God has given the individual Christian the freedom to either do something or not do something. Read this chapter, then, and consider how God teaches us not to violate our consciences in these matters and not to cause others to stumble in these matters. But, recognize that this passage does *not* address matters in which God has given specific instruction.

Second, God will judge us all by the objective standard of His word. We have already studied this to be true in lesson 5. For instance, Jesus said, “He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). Jesus Christ will simply not judge you solely on the basis of your conscience. Instead, it is His word (and all the Divinely inspired words written in the New Testament) that will be the objective standard we will be judged by. So, even though our consciences may permit us to do a thing that is contrary to God’s word, the thing is still “wrong” and we will be punished accordingly. Remember that Proverbs 14:12 said that there is a way that often *seems right* to us that actually leads to death! Rather than listening to our own consciences more than God, we must learn to train our consciences by God’s word and submit

ultimately to His objective standard of authority that never changes!

Third, God’s word endures forever and will never become irrelevant. Some believe that the Bible is an outdated book that is not particularly relevant to how we should live our lives today. Therefore, they claim that we should live in the way we feel is right. However, God’s word is an enduring book. 1 Peter 1:25 says that the “word of the Lord endures forever.” It never fails to be applicable to our lives. Rather, it remains the true word of God and His power for salvation (Romans 1:16). If we listen to it and accurately apply its message, we will be saved eternally! But, if we reject it, we will be eternally condemned in Hell (even though we may live in good conscience).

Fourth, the Scriptures demonstrate that an individual can act in all good conscience and still fail to please God. Proverbs 14:12 (as quoted earlier) is proof of this. If it is possible to die while doing what *seems right* to us, then our “good consciences” do not always please God. Paul is an example of this. Recall from lesson 4 that Paul believed (as a Jew) that he needed to persecute and kill Christians in order to please God (see Acts 22:3-5 and Acts 26:9-11). And, he did this in “all good conscience” (Acts 23:1). Yet, God was not pleased. His conscience had been shaped by things that were not true. Therefore, he needed to be obedient to God’s instructions (as discussed in lesson 5) in order to be saved and please God. Similarly, there are many people today who have had their consciences trained by things that are not true and, like Paul, fail to please God when they live accordingly. Therefore, “conscience-based Christianity” is not sufficient in seeking God!

## **“Hypocritical Christianity”**

There are many who profess to be Christians (who may have even obeyed the instructions God has given for salvation) who live “double lives.” That is, some look as though they live for Jesus Christ some of their lives while living contrary to God’s laws other times. However, we need to examine this common characteristic by the Scriptures to see whether it is part of the pattern God has revealed about seeking Him.

## **What is “hypocritical Christianity”?**

A hypocrite (by definition) is a play-actor. The term actually is a theatrical term. It references an individual who may be acting out various roles in a play. Therefore, whenever the actor would act one part, he/she would hold up one mask. Then, whenever he/she would play a different part, he/she would hold up a different mask and act in a different kind of way. A hypocrite, then, is someone who is not real or genuine. Rather, it is someone who is fake and pretend.

Unfortunately, hypocrisy is not just limited to the theatre. Instead, it is also the way that some individuals who claim to be Christians try to seek God! They “walk the walk” and “talk the talk” when *some* individuals are around (i.e. elders, the preacher, other members of the local church, family members who are Christians, etc.). Then, they live and talk in other ways whenever they are alone or with a different group of people (i.e. co-workers, classmates, friends, etc.)! Or, perhaps their acts of obedience do not stem from the right motives (i.e. obeying only to keep a good appearance/name, to please their parents, etc.).

## **Why “hypocritical Christianity” is false**

“Hypocritical Christianity” is a false attempt at seeking God because it does not actually seek God’s favor all of the time. Instead, “hypocritical Christianity” attempts to do whatever appears to be most advantageous for the individual at any particular time. And, because it fails to obey God’s will, it is contrary to seeking God.

First, God knows the heart. Acts 15:8 begins, “So God, who knows the heart...” Remember that the God we should be seeking in our lives is Divine (Acts 17:29). This includes the fact that God is able to know anything He desires to know and see anything He desires to see. Proverbs 15:3 says, “The eyes of the Lord are in every place, Keeping watch on the evil and the good.” Therefore, God knows whether you have a heart that is set on living for Him or not. Although you may be successful in deceiving other people about your commitment to seeking God, God will not be fooled. He knows when you violate His laws and when you keep them. And, He promises that you will reap what you sow (see Galatians 6:7-8).

Second, God directly condemns hypocrisy. This God who knows the heart and sees all things repeatedly demonstrates His hatred of hypocrisy. For instance, whenever Jesus lived on this earth, He often confronted the hypocrisy of the Jewish leaders of that time. Many of these people were well respected by the Jewish community for being devoutly religious. Yet, Jesus saw through their hypocrisy and knew that they were not keeping God’s commandments as they should. For instance, in Matthew 15:1-11, Jesus called them hypocrites when they drew near to God with their mouths, honored Him with their lips, but had hearts that were far away from God and worshiped Him in vain by teaching the doctrines and commandments of men! In Matthew 23, Jesus presents an extensive discourse on hypocrisy. For instance, He exposed the hypocrisy of religious leaders who bound God’s instructions on other people but would not obey God’s instructions themselves. And, in Luke 12:2, Jesus identified the hypocrisy of the Pharisees (a strict sect of Judaism) as “leaven.”

Third, God expects genuineness. Go back and review the things we discussed in lesson 3. In all of them, you should be able to see that God expects genuineness. Furthermore, think about the examples of individuals who sought God we discussed in lesson 4. Ask yourself: Were they hypocrites? No, they were not perfect. But, they also did not live hypocritical lives when they were truly seeking God! Similarly, God expects to come absolutely first in our lives (Matthew 6:33). He instructs us to present our bodies to Him as living sacrifices that are holy and acceptable to Him (Romans 12:1). Surely, this means that we cannot possibly seek God if we are only seeking Him while certain people are around. Certainly, it is impossible to seek God if we are only “part-time Christians” (which is exactly what hypocritical Christians are – if they are even Christians at all)! Therefore, “hypocritical Christianity” is not sufficient in seeking God!

## **“Lukewarm Christianity”**

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There are many who claim to be Christians and seeking God who are not zealous to do what God wants from their lives. Maybe their love for Christ has grown weak. Maybe their initial obedience to Christ was only to please someone else. Maybe their

initial fervor for seeking God has diminished over time. Regardless of the reason(s) behind it, we need to examine “lukewarm Christianity” by the Scriptures to see whether it is part of the pattern God has revealed about seeking Him.

### ***What is “lukewarm Christianity”?***

The best way to describe “lukewarm Christianity” is by considering what Jesus said in Revelation 3:15-16. In the city of Laodicea there was a local church composed of individuals who had once begun to follow Jesus Christ. However, at the time Jesus addressed them in Revelation 3, they were described as lukewarm. He said, “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth.”

Like these Christians, there are many people today who are like a lukewarm beverage – neither on fire to serve Jesus Christ or cold and against Him. They are somewhere in the middle. Sometimes, they do what Jesus wants them to do. Sometimes they don’t. Many times, they will just do whatever they feel they can “get by” with (doing what they perceive to be the “minimum requirements of Christianity”). Maybe they just go through the motions of serving God. Regardless, they do not have a fire that is burning in their hearts to serve God more and do everything they can to please Him!

### ***Why “lukewarm Christianity” is false***

“Lukewarm Christianity” is a false attempt at seeking God because it is contrary to how Jesus wants His followers to live. In fact, in Revelation 3:15-16, Jesus said that He would have preferred the Laodiceans to be entirely against Him (i.e. cold) rather than be lukewarm in their service! Their lukewarmness simply did not accomplish Christ’s purposes for them. In fact, it worked against His purposes. Likewise, being lukewarm continues to be contrary to seeking God.

First, Jesus commanded repentance. If the Laodiceans desired to please God and truly seek Him, they had to realize that they could not remain lukewarm. In verse 19, Jesus told them, “As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.” The only way they could truly seek God is if they turned their lives around. They needed to repent of being lukewarm. And, they needed to be

fervent (zealous) to accomplish the will of Jesus Christ. Therefore, those who are lukewarm today in seeking God need to take this same prescription from Jesus Christ. Like the Laodiceans, they are in a spiritually destitute situation in their lukewarmness. And, there is no path to pleasing God through “lukewarm Christianity.” The only option that involves pleasing God is to change and be zealous!

Second, Jesus demands whole-hearted allegiance. As we saw in lesson 3 (particularly), seeking God is not a half-hearted endeavor. In Revelation 3:20, Jesus said, “Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me.” But, if we want to open the door for Jesus to take control of our lives, this means that we must allow Him to have control over every area of our lives – not just a few! In Matthew 12:30, Jesus said, “He who is not with Me is against Me, and he who does not gather with Me scatters abroad.” There is no acceptable option of being partially committed to serving Jesus Christ. We are either entirely with Him or we are entirely against Him. In Luke 14:25-33, Jesus said that those who do not put Him before their possessions, their family members, and their own lives cannot be His disciples. Therefore, those who attempt to seek God through “lukewarm Christianity” are against Jesus Christ.

Third, Jesus did not die for people to be lukewarm in His service. Jesus Christ came to this earth, suffer, and die so that people could have the opportunity to be forgiven of their sins, be reconciled to God, and have a home in Heaven for all eternity. And, He did not fulfill this mission in a lukewarm kind of way. He gave everything He had to give! But, Titus 2:11-14 should help us understand that Jesus did not give Himself in this way for people to be lukewarm in His service! Instead, He “gave Himself for us, that He might redeem us from every lawless deed and purify for Himself His own special people, zealous for good works” (verse 14)! There is too much at stake for the Christian not to give his/her all in living according to God’s instructions. He/she must diligently put sin out of his/her life, must put on the characteristics God desires from His people, must be involved in the work of teaching others the message of the gospel so that they can be saved from their sins, must be encouraging their fellow Christians to serve God faithfully, etc. Therefore, “lukewarm Christianity” is not sufficient in seeking God.

# Conclusion

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There are many false ways people try to seek God. Certainly, the five we have discussed in this lesson are only a sample. Still, we have discovered that all five of these are not sufficient in seeking God. In other lessons, we have also considered exactly what it means to seek God and how to seek Him.

So, how are you seeking God? Are you seeking Him faithfully by being obedient to His word (as we discussed in lesson 5)? Or, have you allowed yourself to adopt a false idea about seeking God. Perhaps you are seeking Him in one of the false ways we have discussed in this lesson. Or, perhaps there is another false way you are seeking Him. Regardless, you must recognize that only those who seek God in the way He desires to be sought (as revealed in the pages of His word) will find Him!

## Study Questions

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### 1. “Faith Only Christianity”

What is “faith only Christianity”?

Why is “faith only Christianity” false?

### 2. “Denominational Christianity”

What is “denominational Christianity”?

Why is “denominational Christianity” false?

### 3. “Conscience-Based Christianity”

What is “conscience-based Christianity”?

Why is “conscience-based Christianity” false?

### 4. “Hypocritical Christianity”

What is “hypocritical Christianity”?

Why is “hypocritical Christianity” false?

### 5. “Lukewarm Christianity”

What is “lukewarm Christianity”?

Why is “lukewarm Christianity” false?

# Lesson 7:

## Obstacles To Seeking God

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Seeking God is central to living a life that is pleasing to God. But, as we began to discover in the previous lesson, not everyone will seek God according to the way He desires to be sought. In fact, the Scriptures teach that there is an enemy of mankind who is actively working to deter people from seeking after God. This enemy is most commonly referred to as the devil, or Satan.

1 Peter 5:8-9 was written to those who were trying to seek God in their lives (i.e. those who were Christians), warning them about this enemy. “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.” This one opposes the right actions of mankind every opportunity he has. He desires our spiritual destruction so much that he is pictured as a lion that stalks its prey, waiting for an opportunity to kill. There is no other course of action to be taken against this enemy except to resist him at every turn. But, in order to resist this crafty enemy, we must always remain on guard.

The fact that we have this kind of a fierce adversary implies that we will experience a number of obstacles to seeking God. In fact, 2 Corinthians 2:11 warns about Satan taking advantage of us and states that “we are not ignorant of his devices.”

Therefore, through the pages of God’s inspired word, God provides us with all of the information we need concerning how this fierce enemy operates. Yes, he has many different tactics he uses to oppose people who attempt to seek God. But, we (through the study of God’s word) can know the tactics he uses and overcome them.

Therefore, as we study about seeking God, we need to focus on this great adversary of mankind and some of the tactics he uses to deter us from seeking God. We need to proactively consider these obstacles that we will face as we try to seek God and consider how it is that we can overcome each one.

## Doubt

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Satan wants you to doubt God. Satan knows that if he can replace your faith (full confidence in God) with doubt that your actions will follow. Rather than your actions reflecting a heart that has absolute trust in God, in His word, and in His promises, your actions will reflect questions about the existence of God, the credibility of His word, and the reality of His promises. Therefore, let’s take a few moments to consider this obstacle of doubt – and how to overcome it.

### ***How doubt can be an obstacle***

There are a number of different ways Satan can try to use doubt as an obstacle to seeking God. He wants you to doubt that God actually exists. He wants you to doubt in the word that God has spoken. And, he wants you to doubt the promises God has made.

Sometimes, Satan sows seeds of doubts in hearts because of human suffering: “If there really is a God, why would He allow His creation to suffer and die?” Sometimes, Satan sows seeds of doubt that God will actually do exactly what He has promised: “How can a loving, merciful, and gracious God send anyone to Hell?” Sometimes, Satan sows seeds of doubt that God actually means what He says: “Surely, God will not punish ‘good’ people just because they were not baptized for the forgiveness of their sins – as commanded in Acts 2:38.” Sometimes, Satan sows seeds of doubt that God’s grace and mercy will actually cover an individual’s past sins:

“The sins I have committed in the past are surely so bad that I cannot possibly be forgiven and be saved.”

There are many ways Satan sows these seeds of doubt in the hearts of men and women who live on this earth. But, this is nothing new. The Bible warns us that this is one of the tactics Satan uses. In fact, consider the first temptation ever recorded in the history of mankind. God had commanded Adam and Eve not to eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. He promised them that in the day they ate of that tree, they would die (see Genesis 2:16-17). Yet, Satan questioned, “Has God indeed said, ‘You shall not eat of every tree of the garden?’” (Genesis 3:1). But, the woman was fully convinced that is exactly what God had said. Still, Satan did not stop. After Eve accurately stated God’s law concerning the forbidden tree, Satan told the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Genesis 3:4-5). And, it was through this attempt at sowing doubt in Eve’s mind that Satan succeeded in luring Eve away from seeking God – as Eve took of the forbidden fruit.

### ***How to overcome this obstacle***

Like Eve, Satan wants to get you to doubt God. But, you are not ignorant of this tactic the devil uses to lure people away from God. Therefore, you should equip yourself to respond properly to this obstacle.

First, you must be fully convinced in God’s reality. You can know (without a doubt) that there is a God who is Lord of heaven and earth. Go back and review the things we considered in lesson 1. By observing the wonders of the world and universe around you, you can be absolutely convinced that there is an eternal and all-powerful God who is behind it all (see Romans 1:19-22 and Psalm 19:1).

Second, you must fully trust His word. You can know (without a doubt) that the Bible contains the words of this all-powerful, all-knowing, and eternal God! By considering the complete accuracy of the Bible in its prophecies, by considering the perfect harmony of the Bible’s message, and by considering the Bible’s historic and scientific accuracy, you can know that the Bible must be the product of the all-knowing God who is Lord of heaven and earth! Certainly, no man (or group of men) could have accomplished what the Bible has accomplished or perfectly predicted and stated all

that the Bible has said. Therefore, you can be absolutely convinced that all of the commands and instructions contained in the pages of the Bible are from the God who will judge the world.

Third, you must be fully convinced that God cannot lie. God has made many promises in the pages of His word. He has made promises pertaining to disobedience as well as promises pertaining to obedience. And, as He demonstrated with Adam and Eve, He always keeps His promises and does exactly what He has said He will do. Remember that God is holy. And, as a holy God who cannot be involved in anything that is evil, God cannot lie (Titus 1:2).

## **Pride**

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Satan wants you to trust more in yourself or in other men and women than you trust in God. He knows that the ways of man are not the same as the ways of God. So, if he can successfully convince people to follow their own thoughts or the thoughts of other men and women by appealing to their sense of pride, he can lure people away from seeking God. Therefore, let’s take a few moments to consider this obstacle of pride – and how to overcome it.

### ***How pride can be an obstacle***

Satan can appeal to our senses of pride in many different ways. But, in them all, there is a failure to recognize God’s ways as best. Instead, Satan wants you to think that you are so wise and knowledgeable that you either do not need God or that you know better than God.

Sometimes, Satan appeals to pride whenever he attempts to convince people to trust in “science” and “scientists” rather than God. Sometimes, Satan appeals to pride whenever he attempts to convince people that their own ideas about life, morality, and the afterlife are better than what God has revealed about the same. Sometimes, Satan appeals to pride whenever he attempts to convince people that they know what will produce happiness and joy better than doing what God says will produce these. Sometimes, Satan appeals to pride whenever he attempts to convince people to hold to the traditions established by man rather than do things according to God’s laws.

Satan, whose pride may have led to his own downfall (see 1 Timothy 3:6), tries to appeal to man's pride in many different ways. But, God has warned us about this tactic of the devil. In fact, we can see the element of pride in the story of Naaman (the leper) in 2 Kings 5. When this great commander of the Syrian army was told by a messenger sent from God's prophet Elisha that he would be cleansed of his leprosy if he dipped in the Jordan River seven times, Naaman became furious. After hearing this solution to his problem, he said, "Indeed, I said to myself, 'He will surely come out to me, and stand and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and heal the leprosy'" (verse 11). In fact, he even concluded that there were better rivers to dip in besides the Jordan River (verse 12). Naaman thought there was a better way to be cleansed. And, as long as he was unwilling to humble himself to obey the instructions of God, he remained a leper. But, when he obeyed God, he was cleansed!

### ***How to overcome this obstacle***

Like Naaman, Satan wants you to think you know better than God. He wants you to think you know about the origin of this world better than God. He wants you to think you know what it takes to please God better than God does. He wants you to think that you do not need God or Jesus in order to be saved from your sins. He wants you to think that you know the path to true happiness better than God. Therefore, you should equip yourself to respond properly to this obstacle.

First, you must recognize that man's thoughts and ideas are far inferior to God's. Jeremiah 10:23 reveals that mankind is not capable of directing his own steps during his life on this earth in a way that is pleasing to God and beneficial for himself. Instead, the implication is that man needs God to guide him. In fact, Isaiah 55:8-9 reveals that God's thoughts and ways are different from our thoughts and ways – and that His are as superior to ours as the heavens are higher than the earth! So, anytime we are tempted to place our confidence in mankind, let's remember that "the foolishness of God is wiser than men" (1 Corinthians 1:25).

Second, you must recognize that only God's ways will lead to the salvation of our souls. Even though Satan often appeals to the pride of man to convince him that he knows what it takes to please God and be saved, God says that mankind can only

be saved if he humbly submits to God's instructions. Proverbs 14:12 says that there is a way that seems right to man, but that it leads to death. Instead of following what mankind believes is acceptable to God, we must learn that it is only the truth God has revealed that is capable of setting mankind free from sin (John 8:32). Therefore, it is the gospel of Jesus Christ that is the "power of God to salvation for everyone who believes" (Romans 1:16)!

Third, you must recognize that pride always goes before destruction. Just as Naaman would have died as a proud leper as long as he refused to obey God's instruction, those who proudly reject God's wisdom and ways will suffer the spiritual consequences of Hell fire. Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall." Anytime we choose to follow our own ideas rather than humbly submit to God, we will find suffering and consequences.

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## **False Doctrine**

Satan wants you to be deceived by false teachers. While Satan does not want anyone to believe in God or act as if they believe in God, he also recognizes that some will choose to accept the reality of God and the Bible as the word of God. Still, this has not stopped Satan from deceiving millions of religious people claiming to seek God. Therefore, let's take a few moments to consider this obstacle of false doctrine – and how to overcome it.

### ***How false doctrine can be an obstacle***

Even within (so-called) "Christianity" there are many people who are failing to seek God because they do not believe the truth God has told people they need to believe. And, consequently, they fail to do what this right doctrine tells them to do. Therefore, Satan is even working through "Christianity" to lure people away from seeking God. In fact, 2 Corinthians 11:14 states that "Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light."

Sometimes, Satan convinces people to follow false doctrine because it is more convenient and less costly than true Bible doctrine. Sometimes, Satan convinces people to follow false doctrine simply because their family members or friends also follow the same false doctrine. Sometimes, Satan convinces



people to follow false doctrine because they place their trust in the teacher. Sometimes, Satan convinces people to follow false doctrine because it sounds right to people who do not diligently study their Bibles.

But, Satan is not alone in accomplishing this work. Just as Satan can transform himself into an angel of light, those who serve Satan can accomplish the same (see 2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Jesus, in Matthew 7:15-20, warned about people who would profess to be speaking words from God but were actually speaking things that were not true. He said that these false prophets are like ravenous wolves in sheep's clothing, implying that there is great destruction for following their false teachings. Furthermore, 2 Peter 2:1-3 warns about false teachers who secretly teach things that are not according to God's truth. It is said that these false teachers will deceive and exploit many with their "deceptive words" and result in destruction for themselves and for those who follow their "destructive ways." Certainly, there are many people today who (in the name of Jesus Christ) teach false doctrines about God, about God's requirements for salvation, about the church, about the afterlife, about Christian living, etc.

### ***How to overcome this obstacle***

Like the millions of people he has deceived through false doctrine and false teachers, Satan wants to deceive you – according to what was identified in 2 Peter 2. Satan is perfectly okay with you believing in God and doing some good things in God's service as long as he has you enslaved to false doctrine. He is happy with this because he knows that if he has you enslaved to false doctrine, he also has you enslaved to sin! Therefore, you need to equip yourself to properly respond to this obstacle.

First, you must recognize the value of true doctrine (teaching). Although it is common for mankind to pridefully claim that "doctrine doesn't matter," God actually says it does. In John 8:31-32, Jesus said, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free." But, if we abide in false doctrine rather than the word of God's truth, we cannot be Christ's disciples and be free from sin! Recall (from another lesson) that those who do not abide in the doctrine of Christ do not have God (see

2 John 1:9-11). Therefore, doctrine matters to your eternal salvation!

Second, you must put all things to the test. 1 John 4:1 says, "Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world." So, you must not believe everything people say – just because they claim that it originates with God. Instead, you must test them. 1 Thessalonians 5:21-22 instructs that you test "all things; hold fast what is good. Abstain from every form of evil." The standard you must use to test all doctrines by is the word of God. Therefore, any doctrine that God's word teaches, you must cling to and never let go. But, any doctrine that God's word does not teach, you must get away from completely.

Third, you must buy the truth and refuse to sell it. Proverbs 23:23 says, "Buy the truth, and do not sell it." Buy the truth no matter what it costs – because it will set you free from your sins and lead you to eternal salvation in Heaven. Be diligent in your search for the truth and buy every ounce of truth you come into contact with along the way. Work diligently to rightly interpret the words God has spoken as truth so that you can avoid any false conclusions. Then, refuse to sell the truth that you have bought. Yes, the truth is more valuable to you than anything else. It is more valuable than earthly wealth and pleasures, than being accepted by your peers, etc. No matter what the offer is or who makes the offer, refuse to sell the truth! The apostle Paul even said that the truth must not be abandoned even if an apostle of Christ or an angel from God would preach a different gospel than the one true gospel (see Galatians 1:6-9)!

## **Discouragement**

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Satan wants you to be discouraged. He doesn't want you to feel that seeking God is worthwhile in your life. So, he uses various tools and people to hinder you from being zealous and wanting to serve God. He wants your path in serving God to be as difficult as it can be possibly be, hoping that you will give up rather than endure the trials. Therefore, let's take a few moments to consider this obstacle of discouragement – and how you can overcome it!

## ***How discouragement can be an obstacle***

Satan has many tools at his disposal to cause your heart to feel troubled and to feel as if serving God just is not worth it. Similar to the obstacle of doubt, Satan wants you to give up on being dedicated to God's service. He wants you to think that serving God faithfully is a "dead end road." He wants you to be consumed by the suffering and hardships you face as a Christian so that you will turn your life to seeking things that are pleasurable to you while you live.

Sometimes, he tries to discourage you through your own health difficulties. Sometimes, he tries to discourage you through the death of a loved one. Sometimes, he tries to discourage you through the suffering you see others experiencing. Sometimes, he tries to discourage you through your own failures. Sometimes, he tries to discourage you by influencing others to reject the truth of the gospel. Sometimes, he tries to discourage you through persecution. Sometimes, he tries to discourage you through financial burdens. Sometimes, he tries to discourage you through other people speaking words of discouragement.

God's prophet Jeremiah is an example of this. As a prophet of God, Jeremiah had been given the responsibility of warning God's people about their unrighteousness and the consequences it would bring. However, the people rejected this warning and mocked Jeremiah. In fact, in Jeremiah 20:7-8, Jeremiah said that he had been made into a laughing stock all of the day for speaking this message of warning to the people. Therefore, he said, "I will not make mention of Him, Nor speak anymore in His name" (Jeremiah 20:9). This discouragement got to Jeremiah to the point that he was ready to quit.

## ***How to overcome this obstacle***

Like he nearly accomplished with Jeremiah, Satan wants you to be so discouraged in seeking God that you give up. However, Jeremiah did not quit. Instead, he said that God's word was in his heart like a burning fire shut up in his bones and he was so wearied in trying to keep from speaking it that he simply could not (see Jeremiah 20:9). Therefore, like Jeremiah, you need to equip yourself to properly respond to this obstacle.

First, you must remember that God is greater than anything Satan uses to try to discourage you.

Romans chapter 8 is full of encouragement for the one who seeks God. Indeed, the apostle Paul declared that "the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (verse 18). Even though there will be difficulties in attempting to seek God, Paul asked, "If God is for us, who can be against us" (verse 31). Then, he identified that God's people (as long as they are faithful to God) will not be overcome by tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, dangers, or death. Instead, "in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him who loved us" (verse 37). Yes, God is greater than everything and everyone else. And, no created thing can separate us from God's love as long as we are faithful to Him (verse 39).

Second, you need to remember what's at stake. Satan wants us to live "in the moment." Therefore, whenever we are discouraged, he wants us to turn to something else that makes us feel better. But, if we turn away from seeking God at these times, we will experience the spiritual consequences of our sins we discussed in lesson 2. Yes, God assures us that we will reap what we have sown (Galatians 6:7-8). If we become discouraged in seeking God so that we turn away from Him and seek the things belonging to the flesh, we will "of the flesh reap corruption." However, if we are faithful to God and continue sowing to the Spirit, we will "of the Spirit reap everlasting life." Therefore, Galatians 6:9 says, "And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart."

Third, you must be absolutely confident that your labor for God is not in vain. Knowing that you will reap what you sow, you must press on in difficult times. Rather than sacrificing your eternal home in Heaven for some short-term pleasures and gain, you must "be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord" (1 Corinthians 15:58). Be assured that there is victory in Jesus Christ (1 Corinthians 15:57). Determine that your hope is in Christ and know that your devotion to seeking God will not be for nothing.

# Peer Pressure

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Satan is actively trying to lure you away from God and stop you from seeking Him. But, you need to recognize that he also actively works to lure you away from God through the people you put yourself around. He uses their influence in your life to open doors for you to sin and discourage you from following God. Therefore, let's take a few moments to consider this obstacle of peer pressure – and how you can overcome it!

## ***How peer pressure can be an obstacle***

That Satan can work to tempt you through other people is seen in the life of Jesus. After Jesus taught His disciples that He would go to Jerusalem, suffer, be killed, and be raised the third day, Peter took Jesus aside and began to rebuke Him. He told Jesus, “Far be it from You, Lord; this shall not happen to You” (Matthew 16:21-22)! Then, Jesus turned to Peter and said, “Get behind Me, Satan! You are an offense to Me, for you are not mindful of the things of God, but the things of men” (Matthew 16:23). Notice that Jesus recognized Satan was using one of His own apostles to tempt Him. Satan, working through Peter, was tempting Jesus to deliver Himself from His suffering and death rather than fulfill the mission of God.

Sometimes, Satan tempts people today through their family members, their friends, their co-workers, their classmates, their neighbors, strangers they meet, etc. Sometimes, Satan uses these peers to lure people into following false doctrine. Sometimes, Satan uses these peers to discourage. Sometimes, Satan uses these peers to instill false ideas in the minds of others. Sometimes, Satan uses these peers to apply pressure to engage in a sinful activity.

We would all do well to learn from Solomon about this obstacle. Solomon was king over Israel and was one of the wisest people to ever live on this earth (as God granted him great wisdom). In fact, Solomon wrote much of the book of Proverbs that serves as a practical guide for wise living. Included in Solomon's own writings were even warnings about peer pressure – especially pressure to commit sexual sins by immoral women. Yet, in his own life, Solomon fell victim to peer pressure. 1 Kings 11 explains how that Solomon (contrary to God's instructions) loved many foreign women. In total, he

had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Sadly, the text states that these wives turned his heart away from God to serve other gods.

## ***How to overcome this obstacle***

Like he did with Solomon and tried to do with Jesus, Satan is attempting to use pressure from the people you put yourself around (your peers) to turn your heart away from seeking God. However, like Jesus, you must resist even this attempt made by Satan to destroy you. Therefore, you need to equip yourself to properly respond to this obstacle.

First, you must value a relationship with God more than a relationship with others. You must determine who is more important in your life. Is it more important to seek a relationship with your family members, friends, co-workers, classmates, neighbors, etc. and have their approval – or is it more important to seek a relationship with the God who is Lord of heaven and earth and have His approval? Jesus clearly indicates that it will not always be possible to have both. In Matthew 10:34-39, Jesus demonstrated that those who choose to stand for God's ways of truth will often become the enemies of their peers (even the closest members of their families). This will happen because our peers will not always choose to stand for the truth. In verses 37-39, Jesus helps us to make the choice to value a relationship with God more than a relationship with anyone else: “He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me. And he who does not take his cross and follow Me is not worthy of Me. He who finds his life will lose it, and he who loses his life for My sake will find it.”

Second, you must be willing to make difficult choices to please God. As we live around people who refuse to seek God, we should expect to make difficult decisions. We should expect to make decisions that please God rather than our peers. For, Jesus said that if we love even our family more than we love Him, we cannot be His disciples (see Luke 14:26). So, we must be prepared to take stands for God even though we may lose a boyfriend/girlfriend, even though our parents may not approve of our decisions, even though our children may be alienated from us, even though we may be mocked by our co-workers or classmates, and even though it pains our hearts to be separated from those we love. Yet, in making these difficult decisions to serve God rather

than please our peers, we will be eternally rewarded for our faithfulness to Christ!

Third, you must exercise caution about who you put yourself around. Realizing that Satan does tempt through other people, we must be very careful as to the people we willingly put ourselves around and give opportunity to influence us. For instance, God had forbidden the Israelites from taking foreign wives because He knew that they would negatively influence His people (see 1 Kings 11:1-2). And, because Solomon did not exercise this diligence, his heart was turned from God to idols. Similarly, 1 Corinthians 15:33 says, “Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits.’”

## Fleshly Desires

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Ultimately, Satan uses the things of this world to try to lure you away from God. He appeals to your physical desires for wealth, pleasures, possessions, acceptance, ease of living, life itself, etc. to turn your heart away from God. Therefore, let’s take a few moments to consider this obstacle of fleshly desires – and how you can overcome it!

### ***How fleshly desires can be an obstacle***

Satan uses temptation to lure people away from God. This process is described in James 1:14-15. “But each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed. Then, when desire has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and sin, when it is full-grown, brings forth death.” So, temptation occurs whenever we become focused on our own fleshly desires – and enticed by the opportunity to fulfill those fleshly desires in ways that are contrary to God’s laws. Then, whenever we give in to those desires and actually act in ways that are contrary to God’s laws, we commit sin – which results in spiritual death (see lesson 2).

Sometimes, Satan appeals to our fleshly desires for money and physical possessions. Sometimes, Satan appeals to our fleshly desires for sexual pleasures. Sometimes, Satan appeals to our desires to do the things our peers are doing. Sometimes, Satan appeals to our desires to indulge ourselves. Sometimes, Satan appeals to our desires to enjoy life to the fullest. Sometimes, Satan appeals to our desires to engage in recreation. Sometimes, Satan

appeals to our desires to have what other people have.

Though there are many physical desires Satan can appeal to, please recognize that it is only temptation whenever we are enticed to fulfill our physical desires rather than do what God wants us to do. An example of this can be seen in Matthew 19:16-22. This passage records the story of a rich young ruler who came to Jesus, asking Jesus, “what good things shall I do that I may have eternal life?” After establishing the fact that this man had been keeping the commandments of God, Jesus said that he still lacked one thing. He was told, “If you want to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow Me” (verse 21). However, verse 22 records the man’s response: “But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.” This man chose his own fleshly desires (i.e. for wealth) above seeking God.

### ***How to overcome this obstacle***

Like he did successfully with this rich man, Satan wants you to choose your own fleshly desires rather than God. He wants you to put yourself first. He wants you to live to fulfill your own desires. Therefore, you need to equip yourself to properly respond to this obstacle!

First, you must determine that you will not love the world or the things in the world. John wrote, “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the 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. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:15-17). When you are tempted to sin by fulfilling your fleshly desires, you are faced with a choice of who you will love more. Either you will love yourself and the things of this world or you will love God (the one who gave His life so that you can be saved).

Second, you must value spiritual treasures more than physical ones. But, why should you love God and value spiritual treasures more than you love the world and physical treasures? John said that it was because the world and the things in the world are temporary. They are passing away. But, those who love God will live eternally in Heaven! Jesus taught the same in Matthew 6:19-21. He warned against

storing up physical treasures on earth because they will not last. In contrast, He said that spiritual treasures are lasting. They have an eternal reward!

Third, you must put your focus on spiritual things. You must apply these truths about the temporary nature of worldly treasures and pleasures so that you can give your entire focus to serving God. Romans 8:5-8 warns that focusing your mind on physical things results in death and hostility with God. However, focusing your mind on the spiritual things of God results in having life and peace with God. Therefore, whenever you are faced with temptation, you must resist it and practice self-discipline as you focus on living a life that pleases God rather than yourself (see 1 Corinthians 9:24-27 and James 4:7)! This is the only kind of life that has eternal rewards!

## Conclusion

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Satan is actively trying to stop you from seeking God. But, with the help of God, you can overcome every one of these obstacles. In fact, God has given you the spiritual armor of truth, righteousness, the preparation of the gospel of peace, faith, salvation, the word of God, and prayer to enable you to “stand against the wiles [schemes] of the devil” (see Ephesians 6:10-18).

But, will you choose to overcome Satan? Do you truly desire to seek God rather than seek your own physical treasures and pleasures? In all things, recognize that you will reap what you sow and recognize that the things of this world are only temporary! Choose to seek God above all of these physical things – and choose to seek Him in the way He desires to be sought!

## Study Questions

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Who is trying to turn your heart away from seeking God? How can we know how this adversary operates?

### 1. Doubt

How can doubt be an obstacle?

How can you overcome this obstacle?

### 2. Pride

How can pride be an obstacle?

How can you overcome this obstacle?

### 3. False Doctrine

How can false doctrine be an obstacle?

How can you overcome this obstacle?

### 4. Discouragement

How can discouragement be an obstacle?

How can you overcome this obstacle?

## **5. Peer Pressure**

How can peer pressure be an obstacle?

How can you overcome this obstacle?

## **6. Fleshly Desires**

How can fleshly desires be an obstacle?

How can you overcome this obstacle?

# Lesson 8:

## Choosing To Seeking God

“But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him” (Hebrews 11:6).

Seeking God is central to living a life that is pleasing to God. In this series of lessons, we have considered the following. In lesson 1, we learned about the God we should be seeking in our lives who is Lord of heaven and earth, and will judge us all some Day. In lesson 2, we learned about why we should seek this God. In lesson 3, we learned about some general things involved in seeking God. In lesson 4, we learned from seven individuals who sought God during their lives. In lesson 5, we learned how to seek God by obeying His word to become Christians and remain faithful to Him. In lesson 6, we learned about some common false ideas people have concerning the work of seeking God. In lesson 7, we learned about some obstacles the devil tries to place in our paths as we seek God and how we can overcome them.

Now, before closing this series of lessons, I want us to once again seriously consider the subject of seeking God. But, we need to consider it in order to make a choice. You will either make the choice to seek God or not to seek God. Throughout this lesson, I hope to candidly convey both the cost involved in

seeking God and the reward of seeking God so that you will make the choice to seek God.

The choice to seek God is not one that should be made lightly. This choice will impact every area of your life and will require great sacrifice and determination. And, most importantly, this choice will impact where we will spend our eternities – either in Heaven or in Hell!

Sadly, most people who live on this earth will make the choice *not* to seek God. Listen to Jesus’ words in Matthew 7:13-14. “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.”

Of all the different ways people live their lives on this earth, Jesus said that they all live walking on one of two paths. One path is narrow. It is difficult to walk on. Therefore, few will walk on it. But, it leads those few to everlasting life in Heaven. This is the path of seeking God. On the other hand, one path is wide. It is easy to walk on. Therefore, many will walk on it. But, it leads to everlasting destruction in Hell. This is the path of not seeking God. Let’s spend some time, then, in this final lesson focusing on helping you make the choice to seek God.

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## The Cost Of Seeking God

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As Jesus indicated in Matthew 7, there is great cost involved in seeking God. It is not the easy way of living on this earth. And, Jesus wanted people not only to recognize the reward of seeking God, but He also wanted people to count the cost of seeking God so as to see whether they are truly willing to do everything that is involved in seeking God. Therefore, let’s spend some time considering the high cost of seeking God by being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Please note that a “disciple” of Jesus Christ is one who learns from Jesus so as to imitate and follow Him.

### ***Discipleship involves complete trust in God***

Without faith, it is “impossible” to please or seek God (Hebrews 11:6). Rather, we must both believe that God exists and that God will reward those who diligently seek Him. We have spent time

already in this series of lessons establishing the fact that this is a full trust in God that leads us to obedience.

Proverbs 3:5-6 says, “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.” Notice the complete way we must trust God. Trusting God with all our hearts means that we must trust Him when things are going well. We must trust Him when things are going poorly. We must trust Him when we are tempted to think that we can handle things by ourselves. And, we must trust Him when it seems like there is no hope.

Furthermore, our trust in God must be so complete that we give Him complete control over all elements of our lives. Rather than leaning on our own “understanding,” we look to Him always for direction and guidance. We do this because we recognize that His ways are always best and our ways are fallible (at best).

### ***Discipleship involves self-denial and sacrifice***

When we fully trust in God’s ways, we will necessarily have situations in our lives that call for self-denial and sacrifice. We will encounter situations in which we may desire to do one thing, but God desires us to do another. Having full trust in God will require that we choose God’s way rather than our own!

Jesus presents a great lesson about self-denial and sacrifice in Luke 9:23-26. “Then He said to them all, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will save it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and is himself destroyed or lost? For whoever is ashamed of Me and My words, of him the Son of Man will be ashamed when He comes in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels.’”

Notice that Jesus presents self-denial as a choice in this passage. “If anyone desires to come after Me....” If you want to be Jesus’ disciple (and receive the reward of being one of His disciples), you must follow Jesus’ instruction in this passage. It is part of the cost of seeking God. It involves self-denial of anything and everything that we may desire or be

tempted with that is contrary to the instructions of God. It involves enduring daily hardships for Jesus Christ (as we will discuss further later in the lesson). It involves following Jesus Christ wherever He leads us through the instructions given in the Bible. In fact, the extent to which we must be willing to deny ourselves, endure hardships, and follow Jesus is even to the point of losing our own physical lives for Christ!

We must, like Paul, consider ourselves to be crucified with Christ. As Paul demonstrated in Galatians 2:20, this means that the lives we live on this earth are no longer about fulfilling our own physical desires. Rather, they are about serving our Lord Jesus Christ! And, we do this recognizing the fact that God has given Jesus Christ to die on the cross so that we could be saved. Now, He requires that we give our lives entirely to Him (see Romans 12:1-2; 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Titus 2:11-14).

### ***Discipleship involves complete submission to God***

Our entire lives must be yielded to the desires of the God who is Lord of heaven and earth if we want to seek God. James 4:7 says, “Therefore submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you.” To “submit” is to yield. Consider, then, the full impact of this verse.

There are two vitally important instructions that are interconnected. First, we must make the decision to yield to God. This implies that we have so much trust in God that we recognize His ways as best and that we willingly yield our own interests, desires, thoughts, etc. to His. Second, we must resist the devil. The devil (as we discussed in lesson 7) tries to lure us away from God by appealing to our own fleshly desires. So, resisting the devil involves denying ourselves of things like physical pleasures, physical wealth, ease of living, etc. Then, God promises that if we are willing to yield ourselves entirely to Him and resist the devil, the devil will flee from us and we will be victorious through Jesus Christ!

This principle has wide-reaching implications for how we live our lives. We must allow ourselves to be entirely transformed by the word of God. We must be like clay in God’s hands, allowing Him (through His word) to mold and shape us into exactly what He desires for us to be. Then, not only will this full submission to God lead us to



denying ourselves of things that are contrary to the will of God, but it will also lead us to doing the things God instructs us to do. This will involve a dedication to serving and doing good to others, being active in teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ to the lost, encouraging others who are trying to seek God, etc.

### ***Discipleship involves suffering***

Not only is the life of a disciple fully given to God's control, but the Bible also promises that there will be hardships experienced directly linked with this commitment to serve God. In 2 Timothy 3:12, Paul wrote, "Yes, and all who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution." This was not just applicable to those disciples of Christ who were living during the first few centuries after Jesus Christ lived on earth. Instead, Paul said that everyone who desires to "live godly in Christ Jesus will suffer persecution."

The follower of Jesus Christ will experience persecution because the same root causes that have always been responsible for persecution are still actively at work in the world today. In John 15:18-21, Jesus explains that the world hated Him. Therefore, He says that the world will hate all those who follow Him. Just as the world persecuted Jesus, the world will persecute His disciples. This is because the ways of the world are contrary to the ways of Jesus Christ (see 1 John 2:15-17). So, as we live to resemble Jesus' life in our own and expose the wickedness that is in the world, we should expect to experience hatred from the world.

Sometimes, this persecution will be verbal. There will be times that the disciple of Christ will be harassed for following Christ. For instance, in Matthew 5:10-12, Jesus speaks of those who are "persecuted for righteousness' sake" being blessed because "theirs is the kingdom of heaven," and those who are reviled, persecuted, and spoken against falsely for the sake of Christ being blessed and rejoicing with exceeding gladness because their reward in Heaven is great. And, 1 Peter 4:3-4 says that some will speak evil of those who turn their lives away from sin to Jesus Christ because they will think this kind of living is "strange."

Sometimes, this persecution will be emotional. For instance, those who speak evil of the new convert to Christ in 1 Peter 4:3-4 are individuals who were formerly associated with the individual. Perhaps these are family members, friends, co-

workers, classmates, etc. And, Jesus plainly indicated that His people would become the enemies of even family members who would reject the gospel of Jesus Christ (see Matthew 10:34-39). Certainly, this kind of rejection from an individual's peers and loved ones will hurt the disciple of Christ emotionally.

Sometimes, this persecution is physical. Although the degree to which Christians are physically persecuted has always varied (sometimes more intense and more widespread than others), the threat is always there. In fact, some who have been disciples of Christ have made the ultimate sacrifice for Christ by dying for Him – even being tortured in inhumane ways. Other forms of physical persecution are financial burdens placed upon individuals for following Christ, unjust imprisonment, etc.

### ***Discipleship involves no turning back***

Being a disciple of Jesus Christ is not a partial decision to commit to Jesus Christ. Instead, it must be a complete one. In Luke 9:57-62, Jesus addressed this issue. One individual told Jesus, "Lord, I will follow You wherever You go." However, Jesus warned him about the great cost and sacrifice involved in following Him: "Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head." Jesus told another, "Follow Me." However, that individual wanted to do something else first. He told Jesus, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father." Jesus responded, "Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God." Finally, another told Jesus, "Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go and bid them farewell who are at my house." To this individual, Jesus simply responded, "No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God."

This passage ought to cement a few things in our minds. First, true discipleship puts following Jesus as priority number one. Second, those who choose to become Jesus' disciples need to recognize the high cost of discipleship. Third, it is unacceptable to Jesus for an individual to become one of His disciples and then turn back. Jesus wants His followers to be entirely devoted to following after Him! An individual cannot expect to be a true disciple of Jesus Christ, thinking that he/she can always turn back and live for sin if it doesn't work out. Furthermore, an individual cannot expect to be a

true disciple of Jesus Christ, thinking that he/she can still dabble in sin.

While this does *not* mean that the true disciple of Jesus Christ will live a sinless life (see 1 John 1:8-2:2), it does mean that the disciple's mindset should not be one that is focused on living for sin. Instead, true discipleship involves a mindset that is entirely focused on following Jesus Christ without turning back to live for sin. Therefore, true discipleship is a lifelong endeavor – as we will only receive the crown of life if we remain faithful to Christ through the point of our physical deaths (Revelation 2:10).

### ***Count the cost!***

The cost of true discipleship is high indeed! In fact, true discipleship costs us everything that we have while we live on this earth. To be a true disciple of Jesus, we must give Him everything we are, endure whatever hardships come along, and follow Jesus wherever He leads. He must come absolutely first in our lives.

So, as you consider whether or not you should choose to seek God in your life, Jesus wants you to recognize this cost of discipleship. In Luke 14:26-27, Jesus said, "If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple. And whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me cannot be My disciple."

Now, Jesus does not tell us about this cost of discipleship in order to intimidate or scare us away from being His disciples. Instead, He is simply encouraging us to count the cost. In Luke 14:28-32, Jesus used two examples to illustrate this truth. First, He spoke about a man who had the intentions of building a tower. He said that this man would certainly first sit down and count the cost to see whether or not he had enough to complete the construction, lest he begin to build and fail to finish. Second, He spoke of a king sitting down to count the cost of going to war against another king. Certainly, this king would first consider whether his army could be victorious in such a battle.

In the same way, Jesus wants those who desire to be His disciples to count the cost, lest they begin to follow Him and be unwilling to commit all that Jesus requires. Luke 14:33 says, "So likewise, whoever of you does not forsake all that he has

cannot be My disciple." Simply put, Jesus says that the cost of seeking God is everything we are and everything we have.

## **The Reward Of Seeking God**

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The cost of seeking God is great. But, before we can make a final decision about whether or not to seek God, we must also evaluate the reward for seeking God. For, it is in the reward that will be given to those who seek God that the cost will be seen as insignificant! Remember, Hebrews 11:6 says, "But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him." Therefore, let's consider three individuals who chose to seek God because they looked to the reward.

### ***According to John***

John was a disciple and apostle of Jesus Christ who experienced the cost of discipleship. For instance, Acts 3-5 describes a situation in which both he and the apostle Peter were mistreated for the sake of the gospel. On this occasion, Peter and John encountered a man who was incapable of walking. And, by the power of God, Peter miraculously healed the man. As people gathered around Peter and John to see what had just happened, Peter began preaching to the people. When some of the Jewish leaders heard about the situation, they arrested Peter and John, threatening and forbidding them from preaching in the name of Jesus Christ. Later, as they continued preaching in the name of Christ, all of the apostles were put on trial before the highest Jewish court and were again commanded not to continue preaching in Jesus' name. This time, the passage says that they were all beaten (see Acts 5:40). Yet, the apostles "departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for His name" and continued preaching in the name of Jesus Christ every day (Acts 5:41-42)!

Then, Revelation 1:9 also identifies how John experienced the cost of discipleship. "I, John, both your brother and companion in the tribulation and kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was on the island that is called Patmos for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ." He was a partaker

of the same tribulation that so many Christians were experiencing at this time. This tribulation would become so severe that many even died for the cause of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, this passage indicates how John had been exiled to the island of Patmos “for the word of God and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.”

John experienced the cost of discipleship. But, he was willing to pay the price of discipleship because of the reward of discipleship! John’s writings (particularly in the book of Revelation) clearly indicate his awareness of the reward God will give to those who seek Him faithfully!

In Revelation 2:9-10, for instance, John recorded the words of Jesus to some disciples of Christ who were about to be severely persecuted in the city of Smyrna. “I know your works, tribulation, and poverty (but you are rich); and I know the blasphemy of those who say they are Jews and are not, but are a synagogue of Satan. Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.” John certainly took these words of Christ to heart, knowing that even the cost of dying for Jesus Christ would pale in comparison to the reward of the everlasting crown of life in Heaven to be given to the faithful!

Then, in Revelation 21 and 22, John got a glimpse into Heaven. In these two chapters, John recorded what he saw. He saw a place where there were no tears, death, sorrow, or crying. He saw a place where there was no evil. He saw a place that was beautiful beyond human understanding – with gold, pearls, precious stones, etc. He saw the Tree of Life. He saw a place of never-ending day. And, best of all, he saw a place where God’s people would forever be with God and with Jesus Christ! Therefore, John knew that the rewards of discipleship far surpass the cost!

### ***According to Peter***

Peter was a disciple and apostle of Jesus Christ who experienced the cost of discipleship. Listen to how the apostle Paul described the life of the apostles, in 1 Corinthians 4:9-13. “For I think that God has displayed us, the apostles, last, as men condemned to death; for we have been made a spectacle to the world, both to angels and to men. We

are fools for Christ’s sake, but you are wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are distinguished, but we are dishonored! To the present hour we both hunger and thirst, and we are poorly clothed, and beaten, and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. Being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we endure; being defamed, we entreat. We have been made as the filth of the world, the offscouring of all things until now.”

Though this passage generally describes how the apostles were viewed and treated, it would certainly include the apostle Peter. Yes, Peter endured the hostility we discussed in Acts 3-5. He was imprisoned in Acts 12 and miraculously rescued from a death sentence. And, according to historical tradition, Peter was imprisoned and killed by the powerful Roman Empire (under the leadership of Nero) by being crucified.

Peter experienced the cost of discipleship. But, he was willing to pay the price of discipleship because of the reward of discipleship! Peter’s writings clearly indicate his awareness of the reward God will give to those who seek Him faithfully!

In 1 Peter 1:3-9, Peter wrote to disciples of Christ who were enduring persecution, telling them about the “living hope” that has been made available to them through Jesus Christ. This hope was concerning “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.” The testing of their faith would be worth it, according to Peter, whenever they would be able to “rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith – the salvation of your souls.”

Then, in Peter’s second epistle, he wrote concerning the hope of Christians relative to the Day Jesus Christ returns. On this Day, Peter said that this world will be destroyed by fire. Then, consider the Christian’s outlook described in 2 Peter 3:13-14: “Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless.” This will be a Day of great rejoicing for the faithful disciple of Jesus Christ! Therefore, Peter knew that the rewards of discipleship far surpass the cost!

## ***According to Paul***

Paul was a disciple and apostle of Jesus Christ who experienced the cost of discipleship. His persecutions are well documented by the Scriptures. For instance, in Acts 13 and 14, Paul experienced persecution in Antioch and was thrown out of that city. He fled the city of Iconium when he learned of a plot to abuse and stone him there. And, he was stoned in Lystra to the point people believed he was dead. All of this happened to him because he preached the gospel of Jesus Christ and was a faithful disciple of Christ.

Though there are many passages that describe the persecutions Paul endured, 2 Corinthians 11:22-33 records a summary. In this text, Paul said that he received beatings, was imprisoned, was often faced with death, was shipwrecked, was in danger often, experienced hunger and thirst, experienced cold and nakedness, experienced sleeplessness, etc. All of this was because Paul boldly and faithfully preached the gospel and followed Jesus.

Paul experienced the cost of discipleship. But, he was willing to pay the price of discipleship because of the reward of discipleship! Paul's writings clearly indicate his awareness of the reward God will give to those who seek Him faithfully!

In the same book Paul identified all of these types of hardships he had endured as a disciple of Jesus Christ, he also spoke about why he endured them. 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 says, "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." Notice that Paul describes all of these hardships as being "light affliction." Now, certainly they were neither painless nor pleasurable. Yet, in comparison to the future reward that will be given to Christ's faithful disciples, Paul recognized that they were insignificant!

Paul expressed the same basic sentiment in Romans 8:16-18. In verses 16 and 17, Paul identified the fact that those who follow God are children of God. And, those who are children of God are heirs of

God and joint heirs with Jesus Christ. However, in order to receive this wonderful inheritance, Paul said that we must be willing to suffer with Christ. Then, we will be glorified together. Now, consider verse 18: "For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Yes, Paul recognized that even the worst of physical punishments given to those who follow Christ pale in comparison with the reward of everlasting life in Heaven! Therefore, Paul knew that the rewards of discipleship far surpass the cost!

## ***Heaven will surely be worth it all!***

All of this is summarized well in two short parables Jesus taught in Matthew 13. In verse 44, Jesus taught the parable of a hidden treasure: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field, which a man found and hid; and for joy over it he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field." Similarly, verses 45-46 teach the parable of a pearl of great value: "Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it."

Two parables with one meaning. The opportunity to be part of God's kingdom (i.e. His church/collection of the saved) is worth entirely devoting yourself to Jesus Christ. It is worth giving up every other pursuit of your life. It is worth sacrificing everything you have and everything you are – because the reward in Heaven is far greater than anything we could ever experience on this earth. In fact, Jesus simply asked the question, "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul" (Matthew 16:26)?

Those who diligently seek God during their lives on this earth will be rewarded with everlasting life in Heaven. However, those who refuse to diligently seek God during their lives on this earth will be punished with everlasting punishment in Hell. 2 Thessalonians 1:3-9 helps us to see this to be true. In this text, Paul identifies that those who are steadfast and faithful through all their persecutions and tribulations, suffering for the kingdom of God, will be given rest when the Lord Jesus returns for final Judgment. However, those who had not known God or obeyed the gospel of Jesus Christ will experience the wrath and vengeance of the Almighty

God and “be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.”

I would like to encourage you to consider the words of two songs that convey the ideas we have been studying in this lesson. The first is entitled, “Heaven Will Surely Be Worth It All,” written by W. Oliver Cooper [“Heaven Will Surely Be Worth It All” (1997). In R. Stevens & D. Shephard (Eds.), *Hymns for Worship*. Bowling Green, Kentucky: Guardian of Truth Foundation.”].

“Often I’m hindered on my way, Burdened so heavy I almost fall; Then I hear Jesus sweetly say; ‘Heaven will surely be worth it all.’

“Many the trial, toils and tears, Many a heartache may hear appall; But the dear Lord so truly says: ‘Heaven will surely be worth it all.’

“Toiling and pain I will endure, Till I shall hear the death angel call; Jesus has promised and I’m sure Heaven will surely be worth it all.

“Heaven will surely be worth it all. Worth all the sorrows that here befall; After this life with all of its strife, Heaven will surely be worth it all.”

The second song is entitled, “There’s A Crown For Your Cross,” written by Miss Ada Powell [There’s A Crown For Your Cross. (1960). In E. Crum (Ed.), *Sacred Selections For The Church*. Kendallville, Indiana: Sacred Selections.].

“There’s a crown for your cross, when the teardrops that stray Will be driven forever away; Where the cares that oppress will at last be laid down, You’ll be given a beautiful crown.

“There’s a crown for your cross when the daylight shall dawn, When the night’s dreary shadows are gone; You will meet with glad smiles and never a frown, You’ll be given a beautiful crown.

“There’s a crown for your cross where the sweet flowers grow, On the banks where bright waters doth flow; Where the Savior awaits at the beautiful gate, You’ll be given a beautiful crown.

“There’s a crown for your cross and a power divine, There’s a love all around you will shine; Where a cross for the crown is forever laid down, You’ll be given a beautiful crown.

“There’s a crown for your cross, there is gain for your loss, You’ll be given a crown for your cross;

There’s a beautiful crown when your cross is laid down, You’ll be given a beautiful crown.”

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## Conclusion

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Will you choose to seek God? This is not a choice to be made lightly, as there is much to consider and it is a choice that has many implications. It has physical implications that will dramatically impact the way in which you will live your life. And, it is a choice that has eternal implications. If you choose not to seek God, you will spend eternity in Hell being punished. But, if you choose to seek God, you will spend eternity in Heaven with Him!

Now, you are invited to make the choice to seek God. Because Jesus Christ died on the cross, you have this wonderful opportunity. And, God promises you that if you will seek Him diligently, you will find Him (see Acts 17:27). Once again, consider Hebrews 11:6. “But without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and that He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek Him.”

So, do you choose to seek God? It is time to make that decision. Yes or no? Recognize that not making a decision or only partially committing is a decision *not* to seek God. Don’t procrastinate – as you may not have another opportunity to choose to seek God! While most people on this earth will not choose to seek God, I encourage you to reflect over the things we have studied in these eight lessons and make the choice today that you will seek God!

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## Study Questions

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What have you learned during the course of this series?

Will most people choose to seek God? Why or why not?

## 1. The Cost Of Seeking God

How is trust in God involved in discipleship?

How does Jesus describe the cost/reward of seeking God in Matthew 13:44-46? Will Heaven be worth the cost of seeking God? Explain.

How is self-denial/sacrifice involved in discipleship?

**\*Do you choose to seek God? Explain your reasoning.**

How is complete submission to God involved in discipleship?

How is suffering involved in discipleship?

How is a full commitment involved in discipleship?

Why does Jesus say that folks to “count the cost” before deciding to follow Him?

## 2. The Reward Of Seeking God

Identify how each of the following (1) experienced the cost of discipleship and (2) focused on the reward.

1. John –

2. Peter –

3. Paul –