

DISCOVERING SPIRITUAL MATURITY

Class 201

1 Timothy 4:7

This is Class 201. I'm glad you're here. The background of this class is, at the tenth anniversary of the church I stood up and announced that our goal for the next ten years -- our goal for the decade of the 1990's -- was that, by the end of the 1990's, Saddleback would be the most spiritually mature church in the nation. Some people say that sounds like an arrogant statement. Actually it's not. Every church ought to have that goal. Every church ought to want to have the most spiritually mature church possible.

So we have begun a new program called C.L.A.S.S. -- Christian Life And Service Seminars of which this is one of the four basic classes. There are for basic classes: 101, Discovering My Membership; 201, Discovering Spiritual Maturity; 301, Discovering My Ministry; 401, Discovering My Mission for a total of sixteen hours of training that I have written and put together.

Today, you're in CLASS 2. This class is open to members only because these classes build on each other, especially some of the things we said in 101.

We strongly believe you can't be all that God wants you to be without making some basic commitments. We're going to talk tonight about what are the commitments that help me grow spiritually.

Let's start on page 1 where it says "Welcome to Discovering Spiritual Maturity". I want you to notice first **THE PURPOSE OF THIS CLASS**. What is the purpose?

The purpose is the same goal that Epaphras had for the colossian Christians. He said, "*That you may become mature Christians and that you may fulfill God's will for you.*" That's what God wants us to do. He wants us to grow up. You can circle the word "mature" and "God's will". They are both in the same sentence. It is God's will that you grow up.

Ephesians 4:14-15 "*We are not meant to remain as children but to grow up in every way into Christ.*"

Once you're born into God's family, God wants you to grow up. What does it mean to be born again? It means to be born into God's family. Just like you've got a physical birth that gave you the desire to grow physically, you've had a spiritual birth and God wants you to grow spiritually. There are a lot of immature Christians, but God says He wants you to grow up.

WHAT'S THE FOCUS OF THE CLASS? We're going to focus on four basic habits that every Christian needs to develop in order to grow to spiritual maturity. This class will equip you with the skills you need to begin these habits and will explain the tools you will need to continue these habits.

WHAT IS SPIRITUAL MATURITY?

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Ephesians 4:13 (Phillips translation) *"In the unity of common faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, we arrive at real maturity, the measure of development which is meant by the fullness of Christ."* This verse says that you can define spiritual maturity in one phrase. That phrase is this: Spiritual maturity is being like Christ. It says real maturity is the measure of development which is meant by the phrase "the fullness of Christ."

Notice this has been God's goal all along. Romans 8:29 *"For from the very beginning, God decided that those who came to Him should become like His son."* From the very beginning of time, back in the Garden of Eden when God made man, He said, *"Let us make man in our image."* From the very beginning of time, God has said, "I want to make man like Myself, not to be gods, but to be godly." Not to be sovereign like God but to have godly characteristics that God has.

As a result of sin, the Bible says, that image was marred -- God's original design of making man in His own image. Adam was made in the image of God, but he sinned and that image was marred. Jesus Christ came to earth to die on the cross to pay for our sins and to restore us to the point so that original goal could come back. It says here that we should become like His son.

Notice on the next page. Let's look at some **FACTS ABOUT SPIRITUAL MATURITY.**

1. IT'S NOT AUTOMATIC

In other words, you can be a Christian and you can never grow up spiritually. Hebrews 5:12-13 *"You have been Christians for a long time now, and you ought to be teaching others, but instead you need someone to teach you. When a person is still living on milk, it shows he isn't very far along in the Christian life. He's still a baby Christian."* He's saying it's not automatic. It takes time, effort.

2. IT IS A PROCESS

"Learn to be mature" The Bible says in 2 Peter 3:18, *"Continue to grow in the grace and knowledge of our savior, Jesus Christ."* That indicates a process. It takes time. It's not instantaneous.

I guess what I want to say right here as we start this class and spend the next several hours together is there is no shortcut to spiritual growth. There's no instant pill I could give you that today you could take and tomorrow you're going to be spiritually mature.

People try a lot of shortcuts. Some people look for an emotional experience -- "If I just get this 'certain experience', then all my problems will be solved and I will be a mature Christian." Other people say, "If I could just go to this seminar.... If I could just read this book... If I could just listen to this tape..." Other people say, "If I could just keep a certain set of rules, then I could be all God wants me to be."

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But the Bible says, no. It's a continual process. You have to learn to be mature. But there are some skills that you can learn that will help you grow.

3. IT TAKES DISCIPLINE

1 Timothy 4:7 *"Take the time and the trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit."* Is physical fitness automatic? No. Neither is spiritual fitness. It takes time and trouble. Just like to be physically fit you've got to exercise, develop some basic habits. That's true in the Christian life. The Bible says, *"Discipline yourself for the purpose of godliness."* That's the New American Standard Version of the same verse. It takes discipline.

When you talk about discipline you need to talk about discipleship because the two go together. There are six key truths I want you to understand as an overview to where we're going.

1. The Bible teaches that mature believers are called disciples. That's the term that the Bible uses for a mature believer -- a disciple.
2. The Bible teaches that I cannot be a disciple without being disciplined. In fact the two words go together -- disciple and discipline.
3. The Bible also teaches that the more disciplined I become the more God can use me.
4. The mark of a disciple is cross bearing. Luke 14:27, Jesus said, *"Anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple."* God wants us to bear our cross. We're going to explain what that is.
5. How often am I to do this? The Bible says daily. Jesus said, *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily [circle this] and follow me."*

That's what we're going to talk about. What does it mean in a practical sense to bear our cross.

6. What is involved in cross bearing? Stated up front: Whatever it takes to give Christ first place in my life.

I said earlier, I cannot be a disciple without being disciplined. There are **FOUR HABITS** specifically that we're going to look at in this time together.

How can I become a disciple? By developing disciple habits.

Colossians 3:9-10, *"You have put off the old self with its habits and have put on the new self which God is continually renewing in his own image to bring you to a full knowledge of himself."*

Notice it says God is able to make us in His image when we choose to put off old habits and

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when we choose to put on new habits. That's the way God changes us. God's number one goal is to make us like Christ -- that's maturity, to become like Christ. He says here that it's by putting off the old habits and putting on new habits is how we become like Christ.

There are four habits here: Time with God's Word, Prayer, Tithing, Fellowship. Read through these four verses here and circle the word disciple in each of them.

1. TIME WITH GOD'S WORD. *"If you continue in my Word then you are my disciples indeed. And you will know the truth and the truth will set you free."* The Bible says that the first thing that a disciple is, is he/she is someone who continues in God's Word. So tonight in the first session, we're going to look at how do you get into God's Word on a regular basis?

2. PRAYER. *"If you remain in me, and my words remain in you, then you will ask for anything you wish, and you shall have it. In this way, you become my disciples."* The second thing we're going to look at is the habit of prayer. How do I pray effectively, pray and get answers.

3. TITHING. Jesus said, *"None of you can be my disciples unless he gives up..."* ... ten percent of his possessions. Is that what it says? No. It says *"... unless he gives up all"* Circle "all". How do you get tithing out of that?

Tithing is simply the indication that that's true in our lives. If I'm not willing to give the first ten percent of what I make to God, how can I say that I've given it all to God?

Notice the Bible says in Deuteronomy 14:23, *"The purpose of tithing is to teach you to always put God first in your lives."* In other words, God doesn't need my money. God just says that tithing proves that He's first in my life. We're going to look at that tonight.

If you have a possession that God told you to give it away, and you couldn't give it away, then you don't possess it. It possesses you. You want the proper perspective according to the Bible. When I tithe -- when I write out a check (If I make \$100 and I give the first \$10 back to God) -- it's not like I'm giving God ten percent of my money. Rather, if I'm a Christian, it's God letting me use ninety percent of His money. It's all His. God's letting me keep ninety percent.

4. FELLOWSHIP. *"Love each other just as much as I love you. Your strong love for each other will prove to the world that you are my disciples."* He says as you love each other -- that's fellowship -- you're going to prove that you're My disciples.

I've illustrated the relationship of these four habits on the next page in what we're calling **THE DISCIPLE'S CROSS**. Notice that Prayer and The Word are the vertical because they have to do with my relationship to God. As I talk to God in prayer and as He talks to me in His Word, I have a vertical relationship with God.

But then I also have a relationship with people and with money. So Tithing and Fellowship involve the disciplines in those areas.

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If God is number one in my time and in my money and in my relationships, then He's number one in every area of my life. but if He's not number one in my time and not number one in my money or not number one in my relationships, then He's not really number one in my life.

Let's look at the **DEFINITIONS OF "HABIT"**. I got this out of Webster's Dictionary. "It is a continual, often unconscious inclination to do a certain activity, acquired through frequent repetition."

Or "An established disposition of the character". What this is saying is that character is simply the habitual way of doing things. If you want to have Christlike character, then you just develop the habits that Christ had. Character is simply the habitual way of doing something. For instance, if I've got the character of kindness, it's because I'm habitually kind. If I have the character of saying "I have discipline", it's because I've developed the habit of being disciplined.

The dictionary also defines habit as "A customary practice" -- something you do over and over.

The fact is that all of us are simply a bundle of habits. If you were to look at your life most of the things you do in life you do by habit -- You get up, you brush your teeth by habit, you shave (if you're a man) by habit. I'll bet, men, when you shave you probably start on the same side ninety percent of the time. When you wash yourself in the shower I bet you habitually start with either your left arm or something like that. We are creatures of habit.

How many of you would agree that it's easier to form good habits than it is to get rid of bad habits? It is. The way you get rid of bad habits is by replacing them. So in this 201 class, our goal is to help you replace some bad habits with some good habits that will help you grow in Christ likeness.

Here's the **CLASS OUTLINE:**

We're going to first look at this introduction to spiritual maturity and habits as we've been doing.

Then we're going to look at how to get a grasp on your Bible.

Then we're going to look at the habit of a daily quiet time, a daily time with God.

Then, in Session 2, we're going to look at the habit of prayer, talking with God, the habit of tithing, giving back to God, and the habit of fellowship, enjoying God's family.

Then I'm going to close it off with how to start and maintain good habits. I'm going to give you a six or seven point formula on how you develop good habits that you can use, not only with these things but any time you want to start a habit in any area of your life.

Here's **THE GOAL OF THE CLASS:** That I will commit to the habits necessary for spiritual maturity.

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Romans 6:19 (Phillips) *"In the past you voluntarily gave your body to the service of vice and the purposes of evil. So now give yourselves to the service of righteousness for the purpose of becoming truly good."*

Notice it uses the word "vice". What are vices? They're bad habits. It says when you give yourself to the service of vice that means a lifestyle of bad habits, a lifestyle of sinful habits. In contrast, it says, *"Now give yourselves to the service of righteousness..."* which is a lifestyle of righteous habits or good habits. The Bible says give yourselves. That's a voluntary act or commitment. To benefit from a habit you've got to voluntarily want to do it. It can't be forced on you because you've got to have the right motive. In other words, if you want to diet, it's because you've got to want to diet, not because somebody else is forcing it on you.

HOW TO GET A "GRASP" ON YOUR BIBLE. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 *"The whole Bible was given to us by inspiration from God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives; it straightens us out and helps us to do what is right. It is God's way of making us well prepared at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone."*

That's the purpose of the Bible. It teaches us what is true. It makes us realize what's wrong in our lives. It straightens us out when we get off the path. And it's God's way of making us well prepared at every point, fully equipped to do good to everyone.

How many of you would like to be well prepared at every point and fully equipped to do good to everyone? The answer is in the Bible.

The difference I want to teach you tonight is how to feed yourself. There's an old parable that says, "If you give a man a fish you've fed him for a meal, but if you teach a man to fish, you've fed him for a lifetime." Tonight, I want to teach you how to fish. I want to teach you some basic ways on how to get into God's word.

To start off, trace your hand on the page headed "**SIX WAYS TO GET 'GRASP' ON YOUR BIBLE**". Label these fingers.

On the little finger, write the word "HEAR". That's one way we can get God's word in our lives.

The next finger, write the word "READ". That's the second way.

The third finger, your long finger, is the word "STUDY".

The index finger, is the word "MEMORIZE".

The thumb is the word "MEDITATE".

Down in the middle of your palm write the word "APPLY".

These are the six ways that you can get a grasp on God's word. Hear, Read, Study, Memorize, Meditate, Apply.

When you get a grasp on God's word you want to have more than just the little finger. Most Christians, the only way they take the Bible into their life is they hear it. They don't read it or

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study it. They come to church. They just hear it. Hold your Bible with just that little finger. It's not much of a grasp. See how easy it is for it to be pulled from your grasp?

The Bible says that Scripture is the Word of God, the sword of the Spirit. Using just your little finger, how can you fight the devil as hard as you can?

If you decide to not only hear the word of God, but read the Bible every day, now you've got two fingers to grasp the Bible. The devil can still pull it out, but it's a little bit harder.

The third one -- Hear, Read, *Study*. If you're studying, you're getting a little bit better grip on the Bible. You can still take it away, but not as easy.

Four fingers -- Hear, Read, Study, *Memorize*. That's harder. How much do you forget when you memorize? Nothing.

Then when you add Meditate and Apply -- when you have it all, you have a grasp.

You get the idea. If all you're doing is hearing the Word of God, you're not getting much. But the more of these six things you do, the better grasp you're going to get on God's Word.

Let's look at each of them in detail.

First we're going to talk about **HOW TO HEAR GOD'S WORD**. Romans 10:17 "*Faith comes from hearing the Word of God.*" How many of you would like to have more faith? Hear the Word of God. This is the easiest way to get into God's Word. It's the most common way. But it's also the way we can lose the most content.

Here are some ways to hear God's word: The Bible on tape. (They now have the Bible on CD.) Church services, Bible studies, sermon tapes. (We tape every sermon on Sunday morning and mail them to 42 countries around the world. About 6000 pastors have ordered tapes from Saddleback in the last two or three years.) Radio/television teachers. Every day you can turn on the radio and hear great Bible teachers like Chuck Swindoll or Chuck Smith or Dave Hawking or John MacArthur or Jack Hayford. There's lots of Bible teachers on the radio.

Those are all good. But the problem is, we tend to forget 95% of what we hear within 72 hours. If you want a statistic that will depress your pastor, that's it! Unless you write things down, you're going to forget 95% of what was said this morning by Wednesday. That's why people can go week after week, year after year to church and not really grow. They don't really remember it. And how can you apply it if you don't even remember it. That's why every week I write out all the verses on a piece of paper. So if you forget what I say, that's ok, but at least you've got the Word. You take it home with you to look at.

Suggestion. **FIVE WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR HEARING**

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1. Be ready and eager to hear God. Circle "ready" and "eager".

Jesus said, *"He who has ears to hear, let him hear!"*

James 1:19 says *"Be quick to listen."*

So when you come on Sunday morning or when you go to a Bible study, you ought to prepare your heart, "Lord, I want to be ready to hear."

2. Deal with attitudes that prevent hearing God.

I've got a message I did on this (in March) on the parable of the sower, Luke 8:4-15, in which Jesus says *"Consider carefully how you listen."* In that parable, He talks about that you can have a closed mind (Is there any fear, pride, bitterness preventing me from hearing God?) or a Superficial Mind -- the seed that falls the shallow soil that springs up real quick, but it has a hard bedrock (Am I really serious about hearing God speak?) or you can have a preoccupied mind (Am I too busy and concerned with other things in life to concentrate on what God has to say?)

You need to deal with those kinds of attitudes in order to hear.

3. Confess any sin in your life.

James 1:21 *"Get rid of all moral filth and humbly accept the Word."* If I have a glass filled with water, and I want to pour Dr. Pepper into it, the first thing I've got to do is pour out the water. You can't pour two things in one vessel. He's saying get rid of all the garbage in your life so that God can fill your life with the Word.

"and humbly accept the Word". When I go to hear a pastor or a Bible teacher or somebody speak and when I don't get anything out of a sermon, my first reaction is not "What's wrong with them?" but "What's wrong with me?" Even if the guy is boring, if he's at least quoting a scripture, I ought to at least be able to think about that and think, "What does that mean to my life?" So if I'm not getting anything out of it, I need to say, "What's wrong with me? Am I not tuned in to God?" Many times, you know, I've been speaking on a certain topic, but in the middle of the sermon, God's spoke to you about something totally different. Because God uses verses in different ways for different people.

4. Take notes on what you hear.

Hebrews 2:1 *"We must pay more careful attention to what we've heard, so that we do not drift away!"*

I want to challenge you to keep a spiritual notebook. That's why in all the four basic classes here at Saddleback, we give you a notebook. A spiritual notebook is a tool designed to help me organize and retain the blessings of God. You'll notice that at Saddleback, every outline that we do, we put them with three holes so that they can all fit. You can go back and review them. I began keeping a spiritual notebook eighteen years ago. I have notes on almost every Bible

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study I've heard. I have eighteen spiritual notebooks. You need to keep a notebook. That's one of the basic disciplines that will help you hear the Word of God.

5. Act on what you hear.

James 1:22 *"Do not merely listen to the Word and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says."*

James 1:25 *"Whoever does not simply listen and then forgets it, but puts it into practice [underline this] that person will be blessed in what he does."*

The Bible says that to really be blessed when you hear a Bible study or sermon you need to put it into practice. I've had many people come out on Sunday morning saying, "That was such a great message. It changed my life." Then you never see them again. They are moved but they're not transformed. The Bible says we need to put it into practice. We're going to talk about how to apply the word of God.

Before we go on, put a star by the point you need to work on the most in those five. Is it, Be ready and eager to hear God? Is it to deal with the attitudes that prevent hearing God? Is it confessing the sin in your life? Take notes on what you hear? Act on what you hear? Star one of those you feel that you need to work on.

First we learn How to Hear God's word. Now we're going to look at the second way -- **HOW TO READ GOD'S WORD.**

That gives us a little bit stronger grip. First we just had the little pinky finger, now we've got the ring finger involved too.

How do you read God's Word? The Bible says in Revelation 1:3 *"Happy is the one who reads this book and obeys what is written in it."*

How often should I read God's word? The Bible says you should read it daily. Deuteronomy 17:19 (Living Bible) *"The Scriptures shall be his constant companion. He must read from it everyday of his life so that he will learn to respect the Lord, his God, by obeying all of his commands."* God wants me to read the Word of God on a daily basis.

Suggestions on how to read the word of God.

First you need to read it systematically. You don't use the dip and skip method. Many of you have done this because I have too. You set down on the edge of your bed at night and start to feel guilty -- "I've got to read my Bible!" -- so wherever you open it up that's where you start.

Some of you have heard of the guy who said, "Lord, I want to know your will for my life." He opened up his Bible and put his finger down and it said, *"Judas went out and hung himself."* He thought, "That could not be right." So he closed his Bible and opened it again and put his finger down and it said, *"Go thou and do likewise."* He thought, "Lord, this could not be right. Two out of three..." He opens it a third time and puts his finger down and it said, *"And what thou*

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doest, do quickly."

That's the kind of results you're going to get if you have the dip and skip method, the cafeteria style approach.

You need to pick a book of the Bible and read it a book at a time. When you read a letter you don't read the last part then the first part, then the middle. You read it straight through. Many of these books in the New Testament are letters. They're meant to be read straight through.

Read it systematically. And you need to read all the Bible, not just your favorite parts. Some of you get stuck in Psalms and Proverbs and the Gospels. It's going to be pretty embarrassing when some of you get to heaven and Habakkuk comes up and says, "How did you like my book?" and you're not even going to know he was in the Bible. You need to read the whole thing -- the minor prophets and all the other guys.

2. Read it in a Bible without notes.

I have many Bibles I've taken notes in, that literally every verse is colored a different color. I have some Bibles that every single page, every verse has some notation by it. But when I go to have a quiet time, I do not use a Bible that I've made my notes in. When you do that you have the tendency to see the same thing over and over.

I suggest you have a Bible you use for your quiet time when you're reading through, that has no notes at all so you see something fresh.

There have been times I've read and I've remembered the sermon, or the circumstances and your mind goes off in a whole different direction. Read it in a Bible without notes.

3. Read it in different translations.

I suggest for reading a couple of the modern translations. The Good News translation is excellent and very readable. The Good News was translated by the American Bible Society and the purpose of it was to be used to teach English as a second language overseas. It has a very simple vocabulary for those of us who don't have a very big vocabulary.

The Living Bible is a paraphrase. The Phillips is a paraphrase. But they're very good for Bible reading.

4. I would suggest you read it aloud quietly to yourself.

If your mind tends to wander while you're reading, just read it aloud. Your mind doesn't wander when you're reading aloud.

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5. Underline or color code key verses.

You can put all the promises in blue and all the verses about Jesus in red and all the verses about the Holy Spirit in green. You can make up your color code. I've done that on several different Bibles.

6. Then choose a reading plan and stick with it.

I've put in your outline two or three different reading plans. One is a reading plan how you can read through the entire New Testament in about 30 days. There are more words in the Sunday edition of the *LA Times* than there are in the New Testament. I know people who think nothing of sitting down and perusing the *LA Times* on Sunday cover to cover. But when you say, "Why don't you read through the New Testament?" they say, "Oh, no. That's too long." It's not at all.

There are other reading plans. You can keep a record for yourself through the Bible in a year. Pace yourself. If I read approximately 15 minutes a day I can read through the Bible once a year.

If you've never done it, make that your goal. Do you believe the Bible from cover to cover? Have you read it from cover to cover? How do you know if you believe it from cover to cover?

Kay is going to do the section **HOW TO STUDY GOD'S WORD**.

Kay:

Acts 17:11 says "*They accepted the message eagerly and studied the Scripture every day.*" This is speaking about the Berean church and they are commended that they didn't just accept what was told to them as truth. They went back and looked at the Scriptures everyday to make sure that it coincided with what the Bible said. They are commended and we're to do the same thing. Not just to accept what a Bible teacher tells you but to really know God's word and go back to see if it's verified there.

2 Timothy 2:15 tells us we are to be good workmen. We are to know what His word says and means. How do you know what His word says and means? Only by studying it.

Anyone can learn how to study the Bible. It is not a skill that is reserved for the professional theologians. God intended each of us to know how to do more than just hear it and more than just hear it. He intended us to study His Word.

Suggestions on how to learn to study the Bible.

The difference between reading and studying the Bible is using a pencil. Rick just mentioned that if you don't write down the things that you've heard or read, you'll forget them very quickly. The basic difference between just reading your Bible and studying it is keeping a pencil and a piece of paper and make notes on what you see.

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The secret of effective Bible study is knowing how to ask the right questions. Again, that's a skill that can be learned. You might look at a passage of Scripture and not even know where to begin. Here are some questions you can ask -- basic journalistic questions that you can apply to any passage of scripture and get some insight out of it. Who? What? When? Where? Why? How? You could look at a passage of Scripture and say, "Who is a disciple in this passage of scripture? This says so and so did this. So this is what a disciple is. What are the results of being a disciple? Why should I even attempt to be a disciple? How do I become a disciple?" Just take those questions, look at a passage of Scripture, ask of that passage of Scripture and write down what you see. It's a very simple way to begin studying but it will get you started.

Some resources for Bible study. We are just touching the tip of the iceberg about studying the Bible. The best book on learning how to study the Bible is Rick's book, Dynamic Bible study Methods. I grew up in a pastor's home, I went to Sunday School every Sunday, I went to a Christian college, I married a minister and I still did not know how to study the Bible. Nobody had ever taught me. All I knew how to do was to read. When Rick wrote this book and I read it, I learned for the first time, how to study the Bible. It is an excellent resource. It's designed for the average person.

Some study Bibles. Everybody needs at least one study Bible. Rick mentioned some modern translations and those are great for reading. But for studying the Word you need a study Bible. Four of the best:

For personal application The Life Application Bible published by Tyndale is great. It has all kinds of application questions after you read a passage. It will help you think through what you just read.

The best topical Study Bible is the Thompson Chain Reference Bible.

The best background study Bible is the NIV Study Bible.

The best doctrine study Bible is The Disciple Study Bible.

Before I get any further, I don't want to forget to mention there is a book house in Massachusetts called CBD and they offer the most incredible savings on tapes and books and Bible study helps and Bibles. If you'll contact the church office and talk to Steve he can give you the address. For instance a hard back Thompson Chain Reference Bible at a Bible Book Store it would retail for about \$27.50 but through this book discount house you can get it for about \$13.50. Fantastic savings.

The Bible Handbooks are an A to Z listing of archeological background information telling you about the different people of the Bible. They are tremendous little helps. One of them, Haley's Bible Handbook, has been around for years and years. Billy Graham says next to his Bible that's the best investment he ever made in a book. But some others, Richard's Complete Handbook and Eerdman's, are a little more current. Through this book discount house are about \$6.95. For the price of a paperback novel you can get a little book that will give you tremendous

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information on the Bible and the people in it, the history of it. It's very concise and brief.

Other important study tools:

As many different translations as you can afford. One of the tools that Rick and I use the most is called Any Translation New Testament. It is a Bible that will take a passage of scripture, say John 15:1-8, and it will lay it out on a page from KJV, Living Bible, Good News, NAS, NIV, Phillips. It will lay eight different translations of the Bible for that particular passage side by side on a page. It saves you from spreading out ten different Bibles on your desk. It an excellent tool. We use that probably more than anything else when we're studying.

A complete concordance that corresponds to the translation of the Bible that you use is something that every Christian needs if you really want to get serious about studying the Bible. Have you ever had the experience of talking to somebody and a verse come to mind but you can't remember where it is? A concordance will help you out. It gives you a listing of every single word in the Bible and every time it's used. So if the verse you're looking for has "love" in it you can look up "love" in the alphabetical listing and find the places it was used. There again through this Bible discount house about \$10.99. About half the price you'd pay in a book store.

The next two items, a Bible dictionary and an encyclopedia, are just expanded versions of the Handbook we mentioned. The Bible handbooks are small and concise. The encyclopedia and dictionary go into a lot of detail. They are fun to read. You find things that you've never heard of before. If you have a question about something and you don't know who to ask, you go to the Bible dictionary and look it up and it gives you all the information you want to know. Those are about \$17.95 -- not too expensive.

The last tool you should purchase if you're interested in buying Bible helps is a commentary. A commentary is what professional theologians have gotten together, pulled their wisdom and says, this is what this verse of scripture means. That's great but if you go there first you rob yourself of the joy of finding out things on your own. The New Bible commentary by Eerdmans is the one we recommend. But rely on it only after you've tried to find out the information for yourself.

The last thing listed is the Moody Atlas of Bible Lands. That has maps and charts and things that talk about Israel and Palestine, Egypt, places that are mentioned in the Bible.

Rick:

HOW TO MEMORIZE GOD'S WORD

Proverbs 7:2-3, *"Guard my words as your most precious possession. Write them down, and also keep them within your heart."* Nothing is going to do more for your spiritual life than memorizing Scripture. One of the most powerful habits that you can develop is to memorize

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Scripture. As you put it in your mind I have found they came to my mind when I needed them most. If I hadn't memorized them I would have missed an opportunity to solve a problem, give a word of answer, things like that.

BENEFITS OF MEMORIZING SCRIPTURE:

1. It helps me resist temptation.

We have an example of this with Jesus in the wilderness. When the devil tempted Him, He quoted scripture every time He was tempted. Granted, He did write the book, so He did have a little advantage over us. But He memorized the scripture.

Psalm 119 *"I have hidden your Word in my heart that I might not sin against you."*

2. It helps me make wise decisions

"Your Word is a lamp to guide me and a light for my path." Many times I've prayed, "Lord, what am I going to do now?" and a verse would pop into my mind. Because I had it memorized. If I hadn't have had it memorized the Holy Spirit couldn't have brought it to mind.

3. It strengthens me when I'm under stress.

"Your promises to me are my hope. They give me strength in all my troubles. How they refresh and revive me." When you've got a verse memorized and you're tense, nervous, uptight...

An example: Today, after the first two services, my voice was starting to go out and I was really tired. I thought, "Lord, I've got to have some strength for this third service." And the verse popped into my mind, Isaiah 40:31 *"They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength. They shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall preach and not faint."* I had that memorized and God brought it to mind when I needed it.

4. It comforts me when I'm sad.

Jeremiah 15:16 (Living Bible) *"Your words sustain me. They bring joy to my sorrowing heart and delight me."* Yet notice what Proverbs 22:18 says *"You will be glad if you remember them and you can quote them."* Circle that.

The Bible on the shelf does no good at all. It has all the answers for life but if you don't have it in your life it doesn't make much difference. So the more you can get the book into your mind the stronger Christian you're going to be.

5. It helps me witness to unbelievers.

1 Peter 3:15 *"Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have."* When somebody comes and says to you, "What does the Bible say

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about" or "How do you know that?" If you have that memorized it's going to make you more effective.

WHEN SHOULD YOU MEMORIZE A VERSE?

You can memorize during your quiet time. Another good time is when you're exercising. I like to walk and run through a park. Many times I'll take scripture verses with me on cards. As I'm walking along I'll work on them, memorize them, think about them, quote them in my mind.

While waiting, in spare moments. I know a fellow who has taken the verses on cards and puts them in his car visor. Every time he comes to a stop light, he flips them down. He's memorized over 500 verses at stop lights, never spent any other time memorizing scripture.

At bedtime. It's a good thing to do to go to sleep thinking spiritual thoughts. Psalm 63:6. When I was in college I had a bunk bed. I used to take scripture, write them on cards and paste them (I was on the bottom bunk) on the bottom of the top bunk. Many times when I was too tired to read, I'd just get in bed, and there was the word of God. You wake up in the morning and that's the first thing you see.

You can use anything to help you memorize scripture.

Suggestions on HOW TO MEMORIZE SCRIPTURE

1. Pick a verse that speaks to you. I've given you a list of suggested Scripture verses you might want to memorize.
2. Say the verse reference before and after. The hardest part to remember is the reference, the address, where in the world is the thing. So say it at the start and at the end.
3. Read the verse aloud many times. Record it! You memorize by saying it aloud. You don't memorize things by reading it. You memorize things because our ear has a large factor to do with what we memorize.
4. Break the verse into natural phrases.
5. Emphasize key words when quoting the verse. One way that's kind of fun to do (I've done this with the kids): Write down a verse and erase a word at a time. And repeat it. By the time you've got every word erased you've got it memorized.
6. Write the verse out on flash cards. Carry those cards with you at all times for review. The thing that's very helpful to me is write them out on memory cards and then put them in a container. I've found that the boxes checks come in is just the right size and keep them on your desk.
7. Display your verses in prominent places where you're going to see them. Bathroom mirror,

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over your desk, by your computer.

8. Always memorize the verse word perfect. Memorize it exactly the way its written.
9. Some of you could put the verse to music. Write a song. That's effective.
10. Get a partner so you can check each other.

My suggestion is you begin at the rate of two new verses a week. I wouldn't suggest you try to memorize a verse a day starting out. There are a number of verses you already half know. Many you just need to memorize the reference. You already have a back log of many verses that you already know. Start with two a week, that way you can review last week's plus do this week's. When you start getting a number under your belt you're going to have a lot to review.

There are three keys to memorizing scripture: The first key is to review. Go over and over it. The second key to memorizing scripture is to review. The third key is to review.

Some of you are saying, "I just can't memorize anything." Baloney! We remember what is important to us. I know guys who can give you baseball scores for the last 18 seasons. I know teenagers who can quote the top ten for the last five years. I know ladies that can give you recipes, phone numbers of their friends. You remember what you're interested in. If you're interested in memorizing scripture then you're going to be able to remember it.

How important was it to David? Psalm 119:72 *"The law you gave me means more to me than all the money in the world."* That's how important God's word ought to be to us.

There are some suggested verses you might want to start with or you might want to pick your own. One to memorize right now is 1 Timothy 4:7 in the Phillips translation. This is kind of the theme verse for this class. 1 Timothy 4:7 *"Take the time and trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit."* 1 Timothy 4:7.

Kay:

Meditation is focused thinking about a Bible verse in order to discover how I can apply its truth to my own life.

The word for meditation is also the word for rumination. Rumination is the process where a cow chews its cud, swallows it, regurgitates it, chews it again, swallows it... goes through that process something like seven times. The reason the cow does that is to get every bit of nourishment that it can from that grass.

That's what we're to do with God's word. We are to focus our thinking, spend time on it, trying to drain every bit of spiritual nourishment and food we can from the Word of God.

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How many of you are good worriers? If you're a worrier, you can meditate. Worry is just negative meditation. When you're worrying about something, what are you doing? You're ruminating on it. You're thinking about it. You lay in bed and think and think... and go through it in every way you can. That's negative meditation.

But if you think positive about the Word of God and good things, then that's the kind of meditation Scripture commends.

Three reasons **WHY WE SHOULD MEDITATE ON SCRIPTURE:**

1. It is the key to becoming like Christ.

Proverbs 4:23 *"Your life is shaped by your thoughts."* The truth of the matter is we become whatever it is that we think about the most. If we're thinking about how disaster could strike our family, if we think about how we've failed again at whatever it was we were trying to do, what will happen we will become those things or those things will happen. What you think about is what you become.

But if you want to become like Christ, you've got to spend time thinking about Him.

Romans 12:2 *"Be transformed by the renewing of your mind."* Meditating is part of that renewing process. When you meditate on Scripture, meditate on the Lord, that's partially the way that God is able to renew our minds and replace those bad thoughts with good thoughts.

1 Corinthians 3:18 says *"As we contemplate the Lord's glory, we are being transformed into His likeness."* As we think deeply about the Lord and about His Word, we become more and more like Him. If you want to become like Christ you have to meditate.

2. It is the key to answered prayer.

John 15:7 *"If you live your life in Me, and My words live in your hearts, you can ask for whatever you like, and it will come true for you."* What was the condition? If you are living in My word and my words are living in you then you can ask what you want and it will come true. The more you know Christ, the more your thoughts become His thoughts. So you have confidence when you pray because you know what you're praying is according to God's will. You're confident that your own mind is in line with His and you're not going to be asking for something that is totally out of His will. You can have assurance that it's going to come true.

3. It is the key to successful living.

Joshua 1:8 *"Meditate on the word day and night, so you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful."* This is the only promise of success in the Bible where the word is actually there. If you do this then you will have success. It's tied into meditation.

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Some people would look at that and think it's kind of a magic wand -- if I meditate then there's a presto-chango stuff and I'm going to be successful. That's not it at all. Again it goes back to what you think about is what you become. If you're thinking about the Lord Jesus and His ways and becoming like Him then you're going to have success and live in a successful way. You're going to love people instead of reacting negatively to them. You're going to be honest in business and God prospers those that are honest and have integrity. So it's not a magic wand; it just has a way of bringing our thoughts in line with the Lord so that He can bring success to our life.

SIX WAYS TO MEDITATE ON A VERSE -- These are real simple. Meditation is not hard.

1. Picture it! Visualize the scene in your mind. This works really good on passages of Scripture that are narrative, that tell a story. For instance, the woman at the well. What was it like to be a woman who had been married five times and living with a man now who was not her husband and have a stranger sit down and tell of her life as if He's known her forever. What was that like for that woman? What feelings did that bring in her?

Picture the scene in your mind. Write down what thoughts come.

2. Pronounce it! Say the verse out loud, each time emphasizing a different word. "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" I can do all things through Christ..." Me! Not just Billy Graham or somebody I think is really terrific but God says that I can do all things. Then can. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Gives you hope and encouragement that it's not just some fairy tale out there. God says you can do it. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Not just the easy things but the things that are tough.

Take a verse and emphasize different words as you go through it. You get a new meaning each time you do it.

3. Paraphrase it! Rewrite the verse in your own words. If you're having a hard time understanding what a verse means, if you can somehow put it into your own words, it will give you a lot better idea. I have a hard time with paraphrasing. I can do some of the other methods easier. Some people are real great at taking the Word of God and putting it into their own words. It's a good discipline and helps you meditate.

4. Personalize it! Replace the pronouns or people in the verse with your own name. Stick your name in a promise. This is particularly helpful if you're feeling discouraged and you start thinking that God's word was maybe meant for everyone else but you. If you put your name in a verse then it helps reassure you that "God's word is for me. He really did intend this word for me. This is a promise for me."

5. Pray it! Turn the verse into a prayer and pray it back to God. If you're reading in the Psalms and you hear David saying things like, "*How long, O Lord, will You turn your face from me.*"

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Maybe that day you're particularly feeling that exact same way. Take that prayer and pray it right back to God. It's not unspiritual to do that. You're not copy-cattng. It's Ok to do that. Take the prayers that are in the Bible and pray them right back to the Lord.

6. My favorite way of meditating is a way that works every time. If I come to the word and find that it's dry and I can't get anything out of it, if I use this method Probe it! the Lord always speaks to me.

Rick has made up an acrostic that he calls the **S.P.A.C.E.P.E.T.S. QUESTIONS**. I have this written in the flyleaf of my Bible. So if I've got time when I'm waiting with the children for something and I'm kind of bored I can do a quick Bible study in just minutes and have the Lord speak to me.

S - Is there a **S**in to confess? As I'm looking at this passage of scripture do I see a sin here that I need to confess from my own life. Almost always -- God is so good to show us sins that need to be confessed. I never can come away from the Word without finding something in my life that I need to confess to the Lord.

P - Is there a **P**romise to claim?

A - Is there an **A**ttitude to change? Again, God is so faithful to show me attitudes of mine that are to totally out of line with his way of thinking and I need to change.

a couple of years ago, a very painful experience, was one that God very clearly laid out to me, sin to confess and an attitude to change. I have a younger brother who is a drug addict. At that time we had just found out and I was very angry and as the months went by the anger turned from just anger into hatred for all the pain he had caused in our family. I was reading and getting ready to teach a Bible study one day and came across 1 John 4:18, 19, 20 where it says *"If anyone loves God and hates his brother, he is a liar and the truth is not in him."* It didn't hit me. I thought that was a great verse to share with everybody else, so I wrote it down. Then as I was standing in front of a group of women, sharing and got to that verse and with great conviction I read the verse to them and the Spirit of God almost knocked me off my feet. Because all of a sudden it became true for me that I hated my brother and the truth of God was not in me.

God is done that to me many times. So when your heart is cold and there's places in your life, if you'll use this particular method I can almost guarantee you, God will show you attitudes and sins that need to be changed in you. Hopefully it won't be as public as He did for me. We all want God to humble us, but we don't want Him to humble us publicly. I laid my head down on the table and cried because God really spoke to me.

C - **C**ommand to Obey is the next. Is there a command to obey? God does not give us options in His Word. He does not say, "Would you please love each other if you're having a nice day and everything's going ok." God just says, "Love each other from the heart. You've been cleansed from sin, now love each other." Much of what God gives to us are flat out commands that we are

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to obey whether we feel like it or not.

E - Example to follow. Is there an example to follow in this scripture? Think of Paul in prison, feet and hands bound, there fore years. But what was Paul's attitude? To whine nd complain? Paul's attitude was joyous. That tells me there's an example that I need to follow. In the difficult circumstances of my life instead of responding with whining and complaining, I'm to respond like Paul did. With rejoicing.

P - Prayer to Pray. This is also one of the specific ways to meditate but you can also use it in this SPACEPETS step of finding a prayer as you go along and pray it back to the Lord.

E - Error to Avoid. Is there an error to avoid? Do you remember Ananias and Sapphira in the book of Acts. They did a real stupid thing. They lied to God. Because they lied to God, God killed them on the spot. That tells me that is an error to avoid! I do not want to lie to God. There is consequences.

So when we come to Scriptures like that, write it down. There's an error to avoid. I don't want to be like that person. I don't want to follow what they did.

T - Truth to believe. The same as with commands to obey, there are some difficult truths in scripture. We have the obligation and responsibility to believe them whether we understand them or not. If you come across some passage of scripture and think, "This does not make sense at all" rather than arguing with God about it, rather than saying, "Until I understand it I'm not going to obey it," you just say, "God, this is a truth You've said. I'm going to believe it and trust that in the days and years to come, You will make it clear to me what You meant by this."

S - Always look for **S**omething to thank God for. There is always something in Scripture that you can praise the Lord for. It's either about Him, His character, something He's done for you or someone else. Cultivate that heart of gratitude as you read through scripture and meditate.

Rick:

Let's look at the sixth way to get into God's word. We've talked about Hear, Read, Study, Memorize, Meditate and the palm is Apply. You need to **APPLY GOD'S WORD**. The first are the five ways you get it into your life and then Apply is what you do after you've got it in there.

Notice James 1:22 *"Do not fool yourselves by just listening to the Word. Instead, put it into practice."* Matthew 5:19 says *"Whoever practices and teaches these commands will be called great in the kingdom of heaven."* This is the hardest part for many people -- How do I get the Bible into my life? How do I apply Scripture?

You use the **APPLICATION BRIDGE**. The application bridge is how you get "What did it mean then?" to "What does it mean now?" The key to understand, "What did it mean then?" and "What does it mean now?" in my life is the bridge between them is finding the timeless

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principle. Beneath every story in the Bible (There's no story in the Bible by accident; even the most seemingly insignificant stories are there to teach a principle.) So you look beneath the story and find out what's the general principle then apply that principle to the 1990's.

There are three questions you ask:

1. What did it mean to the original hearers?
2. What is the underlying timeless principle?
3. Where or how could I practice that principle today?

Example:

In Acts 15 there is a verse that says "Don't eat meat that has been strangled or offered to idols?" When was the last time you ate meat strangled or offered to idols? Frankly, I don't think I've ever eaten any meat offered to an idol. You have to figure out, What does this mean to my life? You've got to find the principle beneath it. Here's how you do it.

First you go back and find out, What did it mean then? Get out a Bible dictionary, read about meat offered to idols. You'd find out that what happened in those days is people would take meat and offer it to idols. Now obviously a piece of stone doesn't eat it. So after it's left there for two or three days they'd take it back out on the street and they'd sell it. So they'd make a profit on it. The priests of these pagan religions were taking the meat that was being brought in, taking it out the back door and putting it back out on the market.

For a Jew to eat that kind of meat was a violation of their religion. They're saying when you eat meat that's offered to idols, you're in essence partaking of that religion. Paul comes along and he says, "You know as well as I do that meat is no different than the meat down at McDonalds. The idols aren't real so there's really nothing wrong with that meat, but because it offends people (those who are Jews who've become Christians) you ought to not eat it.

In Acts 15, when you study the context you find out that they had a big conference in Jerusalem. The first Christians were all Jews. Then they found out that all these people who were outside of Israel that Paul was leading to the Lord were becoming Christians -- in Antioch and these Gentile areas. They had to decide at the Jerusalem conference does a person have to become a Jew in order to become a Christian. Do you have to first keep all the Jewish laws (since we're keeping them all, they were saying) does everybody else have to accept Judaism in order to become a Christian.

The final summary of that is No, you don't. Aren't you glad you don't have to keep all the Jewish laws to become a Christian? But, they said, let's send them this suggestion. Don't commit immorality, don't eat meat offered to idols. The first one is real clear -- don't commit immorality.

About the second, don't eat meat offered to idols, what they're saying is you have some Jewish brothers who, if they saw you eating meat offered to idols they would be offended by it. Paul

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says, we know that there's nothing wrong with it, but they would be offended. The principle then is don't do something that would offend your Christian brother. That's the timeless principle.

In fact, Paul applies it again in Romans 14. There he applies this principle. *"Let us make every effort to do what leads to peace and mutual edification."* v. 21 *"It's better not to eat meat or drink wine that will do anything else that will cause your brother to fall. So whatever you believe about these things, keep them between yourself and God. Blessed is the man who does not condemn himself by what he approves."* He's saying there's some things that aren't legitimately wrong, they're not sin, but when you're with other people who would be offended by them, you don't do it.

Now you're getting to the application.

Just a practical application. He says it's better not to eat meat or drink wine. I could make a good case in scripture for moderation in drinking. Personally, I don't think that the Bible teaches total abstinence of alcoholic beverages. I think it's very clear that Jesus drank wine. In fact, it says that even when He made the wine at the wedding, it said, most of the time they give the best stuff at first but you've saved the best stuff (the most fermented) until last.

But none of our pastors drink. I don't drink at all. Why? Because the principle says it's better not to eat meat or drink wine if it offends your brothers. So on our staff, none of our pastors drink and we would not allow an alcoholic beverage at a church function. Why? For the same reason we don't use wine in communion cups. One out of every seven people in America is an alcoholic. What if someone comes to church and they've been on the wagon -- dry for nine years -- they take communion and that one sip leads them to fall back again? Don't do anything that causes people to stumble.

I believe legitimately I would have a right to drink. But I have limited my rights. I've never had a drink of alcohol. Never once in my life. I limit that because I don't want to offend people I'm trying to minister to.

That's what I'm saying for an example of application of a principle behind a story.

After you've discovered the principle, then you want to write out a sentence that describes a project or action you'll take to apply the truth. I've come up with an application, now what am I going to do about it?

Most applications will focus on one of three relationships. When you're trying to apply the Bible to your life, think relationships. My relationship to God, my relationship with myself, my relationship with other people.

There are four marks of a good application project.

- It's personal
- It's practical
- It's possible

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It's provable -- you can prove you've done it.

Example: You're reading the Bible and you come on Ecclesiastes 6:7 *"All the labor of man is for the mouth and yet the appetite is never filled."* All of a sudden the timeless principle you get out of that is we need to control our appetite -- which is a timeless principle. Then the personal application might be "I need to loose some weight".

Personal -- I need to. When you write out an application in a quiet time or when you're studying the Bible and now you're going to write out what you're going to do about it, put it in the first person. "I need to". You don't say, "My parents need to... My kids need to... My husband needs to... My wife needs to..." It's I.

Practical -- I need to loose some weight.

Possible -- I need to lose ten pounds. If it's not possible you're just going to get discouraged. Let's say you read the verse, *"Pray without ceasing"* and you say I'm going to pray for every missionary in the world, every day. You're going to get discouraged. But you could say, "I will pray for one missionary every day." Get started.

Provable -- Set a deadline. I need to loose ten pounds by the end of the month.

What you've become is a doer of the word. Have you noticed on Sunday morning, almost every one of my points has a verb in it. I'll stand up and say, "Here are five things to do." That's intentional. Because the Bible says we are to be doers of the word and not hearers only. Many times we go and hear studies and we hear but we don't go home saying, "What am I to do about it?" We are to apply it.

Write out these applications. Then if you really want to be brave, ask a friend to check up on you. They will be more than willing to check up on you to see if you're following up on your Biblical application!

John 13:17 (Living Bible) *"Now that you know these things, do them. That is the path of blessing."* If you want to be blessed, you need to do these things. I challenge you to commit to these six ways.

Now we're going to look at how do you do this in a practical way? We've taught you six ways to get into the Word. We're going to summarize it all in how do you do this in a quiet time?

Kay is going to come teach **HOW TO HAVE A QUIET TIME.**

Kay:

Definition of a quiet time is a daily time I set aside to be alone with God to get to know Him through the Bible and prayer. Your time alone with God should be the top priority in your schedule for five reasons.

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1. We were created to have fellowship with God.

The Bible says in Genesis 1:27 *"So God created man in his own image."* There was no other part of creation that was given the privilege that human beings were given which is fellowship, dialogue, communication with the creator. No other part of creation has that privilege. It is what we were created for.

Revelation 3:20, *"Look! I've been standing at the door and constantly knocking. If anyone opens the door, I will come in and fellowship with him and he with me."* God's desire is to have fellowship and communion with us as human beings. He says, "I stand at the door and knock" because it's His desire to have fellowship with us. That's why we were created.

2. Jesus died to make the relationship possible.

1 Corinthians 1:9 says *"God has invited you into this wonderful friendship with his Son, Christ our Lord."* When Adam and Eve sinned, the fellowship that God created us for was broken. It took God sending His son, Jesus, to earth to restore that fellowship.

A quiet time is important first of all because God created us that way originally and then Jesus died to restore it after it was broken by sin.

3. Personal time alone with God was Jesus' source of strength.

Mark 1:35 and several other verses tell us *"Jesus often withdrew to lonely places and prayed."* If Jesus knew His personal need for constant communication with God and He was the son of God, how much more do you and I need that constant, everyday time where we're together with the Lord, telling Him how much we love Him.

4. Every person who has been effective in service for God developed this habit.

All through the Bible we're given stories of David and Abraham, Moses -- great men and women of God. If you study the verses out carefully, you'll see that each of them spent much time alone with the Lord and they were effective in service for that very reason.

5. You cannot be a healthy, growing Christian unless you spend time with God.

It's not just a good idea. It's a necessity. Two verses talk about how it's a necessity for us spiritually. Matthew 4:4 *"Man cannot live on bread alone but on every word that God speaks."* Physical food is not enough for you to be healthy. You've got to have spiritual intake of the Word of God. Job 23:12 says (Job speaking) *"I have treasured the words of His mouth more than my necessary food."* What happens if you go a long time physically without food? You get

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sick. You'll die eventually. It's a necessity. Same with spiritual food. Intake of the Word of God will keep you healthy and strong.

"How can a young man cleanse his ways?" Psalm 119:9 says, *"By keeping to your Word."* So our time with God in a quiet time is a spiritual bath. It's a time when we get cleansed from all the sin that has accumulated and built up.

If you don't have a quiet time, you're missing out on the privilege that you're created for. You're rejecting the thing that Jesus died to make possible. You will never be like Jesus and experience the same power and will never be used greatly by God and you will remain a weak and sickly Christian. That should give you motivation to have a quiet time.

Let's look at the **PURPOSE OF A DAILY QUIET TIME.**

1. To give devotion to God.

Psalm 29:2 says *"Give to the Lord the glory due to his name. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness."* The first purpose is for me to come and give to God, not to get from Him. It's time when I start out by saying, "Lord Jesus, I love You. I want to give You my entire life. I belong to You and I want to thank You for all that You've ever done for me. I worship You."

2 Chronicles 31:21 *"Hezekiah was successful because everything he did, he did in a spirit of complete devotion to his God."*

When you come to the Lord, in the morning, the afternoon, or whenever, give your devotion to God first. Tell Him that you love Him. God deserves your devotion. Revelation 4:11 says *"He alone is worthy."* There is no one else worthy of our complete devotion except for God. John 4:23 says God is not only worthy of it but He desires it. He seeks worshipers, He actively seeks it.

It's like your husband or your wife knows that you love them -- you've stuck with them all these years -- but every once in a while it's nice to hear it. The Lord knows that you love Him. He knows your heart. He knows your thoughts. But He likes to hear it for the same reason we like to hear it.

2. To get direction from God.

Psalms 25:4 *"Show me the path where I should go, O Lord; point out the right road for me to walk. Lead me."* When you come to the Lord in a quiet time, after you've told Him that you love Him, start asking God "What is there in my life? What direction do I need to be headed? What goals do I need to be reaching toward?" Reflect upon your life.

Two things to do in a quiet time:

1) Consider your way. Proverbs 4:26 says *"Ponder the path of your feet and let all your*

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ways be established." Take time to be quiet and assess your life. *"In all your ways acknowledge Him, and he will direct your paths."* Proverbs 3:6 says. Look at your life.

2) Commit your day to Him. *"Commit everything you do to the Lord. Trust him to help you do it and he will."* So after you've told the Lord you love Him and you've spent a little time looking over the goals you have for that day commit your schedule to Him. "Lord, I have this plan. This is what I think I'm supposed to be doing today. But really only You know where I'm supposed to be at 9 this morning or 2:30. These are the people I have on my list I'm supposed to be with and talk to today. But you know the people that You've intended for me to be with." When you commit your schedule to the Lord like that, it helps you be more flexible and not get all bent out of shape when things don't go the way you think they should.

3. Gain delight in God

Psalm 37:4 says *"Delight yourself in the Lord; and he will give you the desires of your heart."* Psalm 16:11 *"God's presence fills me with joy and brings me pleasure."* The source of our joy is found in the Lord's presence. If you are experiencing very little joy in your life, stop and think, "How much time am I spending in His presence?"

The fact is, the better I get to know Christ the more I love Him. Remember the old Clairol commercial, "The closer she gets, the better she looks"? It's the same with the Lord. The closer you get to Him the better He looks and the more you fall in love with Him.

The objective of your quiet time is not to study about Christ but to actually spend time with Him. That's why you have two separate times: Bible study and quiet time. Quiet time is just to spend time with God. Bible study time is to learn about Him.

4. To grow daily like God.

2 Peter 1:3-4 *"For as you know him better and better, God will give you, through His great power, everything you need for living a truly good life. He has promised to save us and to give us His own character."* God's purpose for our life has always been to make us like His son. That's why all the things that come into our lives, He says He uses for our ultimate good and for His glory. So when you come and you spend a daily quiet time with the Lord, you're going to grow more like Him as you spend time with Him and you're going to be conformed into His image. Why? Because we become like those we spend time with. If you want to become like the people on the soap operas, if you want to become like Vanna White, then you just keep watching those game shows! But if you want to become like the Lord, then you spend time with Him.

Let's look at **HOW TO BEGIN A QUIET TIME**

You need to do three or four things.

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1. SELECT A SPECIFIC TIME

When's the best time to have a daily quiet time? The best time to have a quiet time is when I'm at my best. That's the rule. I ought to give the best part of my day to God. I shouldn't try to serve God with my leftovers. Select a time when you're most alert and give that time to God.

I want to give you some reasons for considering having an early morning quiet time.

There is the example of Bible characters. Every Bible character -- every great saint in the Bible -- rose early to meet with God. Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Hannah, Job, Hezekiah, David,

Daniel, Jesus... It was Jesus' habit, it was His practice, to rise up in the morning and go out and have time alone with the Father.

I think another reason it just seems logical to begin the day with it. Hudson Taylor said, "The best time to tune up your instrument is before you play the concert, not afterwards!" It strikes me funny, that when you have a quiet time you're putting on the spiritual armor of Ephesians 6, getting ready for battle -- some people put on their spiritual armor and climb into bed.

It demonstrates that meeting with God is your first priority. You give Him the first part of your day. You say, "This is the first part of the day. You're first in my life."

Also your mind will be more rested, your mind is less cluttered and often it's the quietest time early in the morning.

I know one lady who sets her alarm clock for 4 a.m. She gets up in the morning at 4 a.m., has a 30 minute quiet time, goes back to bed then gets up with the rest of the family and 7. I asked her why she does that. She said, "With all the kids in my home, it's the only time the house is quiet."

I have found in my own personal life that if I don't have a quiet time with God in the morning, I usually just don't have it. I am a high RPM type person. I hit the ground running. I need to get with the Lord before I get my engine real revved. Once I get going, my life is so busy that I don't stop until the end of the day. So I find it's good to spend time with God when it's quiet and uncluttered.

Whatever time you set, be consistent. Doctors tell us that the most important meal of your day is breakfast. You might want to start with a spiritual breakfast.

If I told you that tomorrow morning you could meet with Jesus Christ, that He wanted to meet with you at 4 a.m. at the Santa Ana courthouse, you probably wouldn't even go to bed tonight. You'd go find an all night beauty salon or barber, take a bath or two, buy some new clothes, you'd be there an hour early. You don't have to get up at 4 a.m.. You don't even have to go to Santa Ana. But tomorrow morning, Jesus Christ wants to meet with you in your home in that overstuffed easy chair in the living room or wherever you choose. He wants to meet with you.

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You need to be consistent.

Have you ever been stood up on a date? It's not a pleasant experience. Jesus Christ does not like to be stood up either. Make a date with Christ and then keep it on a regular basis.

HOW LONG SHOULD A QUIET TIME BE? Guidelines:

1) I would suggest that you start with 15 minutes a day. Anybody can give 15 minutes a day. Don't start with a two hour quiet time because you'll get two hours the first day, a hour the second day, the third day you'll give up because you don't have time for it. It's better to spend 15 minutes every day than it is to spend an hour every other week. Start with 15 minutes and then let it grow. You'll understand once you get into it. Fifteen minutes goes quickly. Spend 15 minutes a day with God and don't go to sleep until you've done that.

2) Don't watch the clock. That will ruin your quiet time faster than almost anything. You're not going to have much of a relationship with Christ if you're doing that.

3) Emphasize quality not quantity. It's what you do with your time that counts not how long you spend.

2. CHOOSE A SPECIAL PLACE

Luke 22:39 *"Jesus left the city and went, as he usually did, to the Mount of Olives to pray."* Circle "as he usually did". That means, it was his habit. It was an habitual place, a special place. There's really only one important factor that you need here. Solitude. You need to find a place where you can be alone. That may take some creativity given your lifestyle.

Several men in our church, drive to work, get there early and sit in their car in the parking lot for fifteen minutes before they go in. They have their quiet time in their car. I know people who have quiet times outside in their backyard. They have them in parks. When I was in college I had my quiet time one year every morning in the baseball dugout. I'd go out there and sit in the dugout, the sun would come up and nobody was out there and I could talk to the Lord just as I'm talking to you right now. I never fell asleep while I was talking aloud!

Find a place that's special to you. It will become special the more you spend time there. If you get a certain place like in your study at home or you've got a special table and chair and you read your Bible there every day, it's going to become very special to you.

Notice it says *"Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went to a solitary place, where he prayed."*

3. GATHER THE RESOURCES YOU'RE GOING TO NEED

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Get a Bible with readable print. Some Bibles are nice to carry in your purse but I wouldn't suggest that for a quiet time. You get up in the morning, your eyes are bleary, you need a Bible with readable print. Get the large type.

You need a notebook to write down what the Lord speaks to you. If you've taken 101 class, you've gotten this notebook. Keep your sermon notes and quiet time notes in there.

It's helpful to have a songbook. Sometimes you just want to sing and you can sing songs to the Lord.

4. BEGIN WITH THE RIGHT ATTITUDE. There are three things you need to have.

1) Reverence. You need reverence for the Lord. The Bible says, "*Be still, and know that I am God.*" You don't rush into God's presence. You prepare your heart. You don't come into a quiet time like you're going to a football game. "Yeh! Yeh! Rah! Rah! Let's go, God!" Have reverence. "*Be still, and know that I am God.*"

2) Expectancy. The Bible says, "*Open my eyes to see wonderful things in your Word.*" When you come to your quiet time, say, "Lord, I expect You to talk to me today. I expect to meet with You. I expect you to say something to me out of Your word."

3) Willingness to obey. John 7:17 "*Whoever is willing to do what God wants will know whether it's true or not.*" Being willing in advance. "Lord, before I even open this book, the Bible, I want You to know that I'm willing in advance to do what You want me to do. I'm saying 'Yes' in advance."

5. FOLLOW A SIMPLY PLAN.

Don't complicate your quiet time. I'm going to give you a simple plan to get your started that I call **FIFTEEN MINUTES WITH GOD.**

1) Relax. That takes about a minute. Be still. Be quiet. Show down. Prepare your heart. Take two or three deep breaths. Especially in the morning, if you just got up, maybe you don't want to relax too long because you might go back to sleep. Relax.

2) Read. Read a section of Scripture. Spend about four minutes just reading. Go back and review the section on "How to Read God's Word". Remember we said read it systematically, aloud, in a modern translation, in a Bible without notes. Begin where you left off the day before. Read until you feel God's taught you something. I usually read until God speaks to me. If He doesn't speak in one chapter I just keep reading. Sometimes I only get eight or nine verses. That's ok. It's not how much you cover but what does God say to you? When God speaks to you, you stop and you think about it.

3) Reflect. I'm talking about, you meditate on the scripture. How do you meditate? Use

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those six ways that Kay taught you on how to meditate on scripture. Picture it, Pronounce it, Paraphrase it, Probe it -- SPACEPETS questions -- I look for those nine things; I'm meditating on scripture. I'm digesting. Meditation is thought digestion.

Think about what the passage means to your life and then write down your thoughts. Part of reflecting is memorizing verses that speak to you in a special way. Look at the section on How to Memorize.

So you read for about four minutes and you think about it for about four minutes.

4) Record for about two minutes. In the recording section, you're going to write out a personal application statement. Review the notes on How to Apply God's Word. Write an application that is personal, practical and measurable. Dawson Trotman said, "Thoughts disentangle themselves when they pass through the lips and the fingertips." In other words, if I can't say it and I can't write it down, I haven't really thought about it. But if I can write it down, what am I going to do about this verse, then I've clearly thought it through -- I'm becoming a doer of the word.

5) Then I Request. This is your prayer time. Make your requests. Conclude your quiet time by talking to God about what He has shown you and making your requests from your prayer list.

I want to conclude this by a discussion on **HOW TO OVERCOME THE MOST COMMON PROBLEMS IN YOUR QUIET TIME.**

1. THE PROBLEM OF DISCIPLINE

This is the battle of the blankets. Billy Hanks tells the story about a young man who tries to offer an excuse to God for not having his quiet time. He said, "Oh, Lord. I'm really sorry. I wanted to meet with You this morning but something came up." God said, "Yeah, I know. I saw it. It's called a sheet."

Your first problem in establishing a quiet time you will face the moment you wake up in the morning -- "Am I going to get out of bed? Am I going to get out of bed that fifteen minutes earlier or am I going to lay in bed?" The devil will always exaggerate how tired you are. When the devil and your flesh team up together, you've got a potent combo that are trying to keep you from having a quiet time.

You need to first have a desire -- I want to meet with God. Then decision -- I'm going to meet with God. Then the determination and discipline to get out of bed and do it.

Some suggestions that will help you with the problem of discipline:

1) Go to bed on time. You can't get up early if you're going to stay up late. For some reason most people like to stay up late. Maybe it's because your parents wouldn't let you do it

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when you were kids. Now you're grown up and you're going to show them! Anything you couldn't do as a kid must be fun! Dawson Trotman used to have the philosophy, "If what I'm doing at 10:00 at night is more important than my quiet time, then I'll stay up. But if it's not, then I'm going to bed!" He had been known, even when they had guests, to get up, excuse himself, pass out magazines and say, "Folks, I'm going to bed. You can stay here as long as you want. I've got an appointment with God tomorrow morning and, frankly, my appointment with God is the most important thing in my life."

2) Get up immediately. I have found that the battle is usually won or lost in the first few seconds. If you wait you're going to be defeated. One famous Christian was asked, "Do you pray about getting up to have your quiet time?" He said, "No! I just get up!" If you're going to pray about it, pray about it the night before. The time to decide is not the next morning, because the devil will say not to do it.

3) Be aware of quiet time robbers. Be alert to things that are going to keep you from having a quiet time. Ninety percent of those things happen the night before. The quiet time robbers have names like "Johnny, Arsenio and *Cheers* reruns." Late night TV is the number one robber keeping people from having a quiet time.

4) Fall asleep thinking spiritual thoughts. Have you ever gone to bed at night singing a song and you wake up the next morning and it's still on your mind? Why not go to bed with the last thing you're thinking about, "Lord, I'll see You in the morning." Go to bed with a spiritual thought. You have eight hours of unbroken fellowship. No sin. You get credit for that! Eight hours of unbroken fellowship, no sin in your life. Fall asleep thinking about God.

2. THE PROBLEM OF DISTRACTIONS

Satan will try to use anything he can to get your mind to wander during a quiet time.
Suggestions:

1) Get out of bed. Never try to have a quiet time in bed. I know in college I used to try this. An hour later I'd wake up with a Bible on my chest. How spiritual! But you don't get the Bible in your mind by osmosis. You've got to read it.

2) Get thoroughly awake. I have a friend I've been with out on speaking engagements. He gets up in the morning and slaps Aqua Velva all over his face, runs around the room. He's a real sleepy head, kind of groggy until about eleven in the morning. He puts this stuff on to get awake, then he sits down to have his quiet time.

3) Read and pray aloud. That keeps your concentration.

4) Walk during your prayer time. That's a good thing to do. You will never fall asleep while you're walking. Study scripture: How many times Jesus either taught or prayed while He was walking. So you get double. You're building your soul and your body at the same time.

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Physical and spiritual fitness at the same time. Sit down and have your quiet time, read some scripture, write out your application, then grab your memory verses and go for a walk for the rest of your quiet time. You could pray while you're walking.

5) Keep a notepad nearby. Have you ever been praying along and all of a sudden the devil reminds you of something you cannot forget. He will gladly cause you to remember all kinds of things just to keep you from praying. There's nothing that says you can't stop in the middle of a prayer, write something down and then go back and pray again. That's perfectly legitimate.

3. THE PROBLEM OF DRYNESS

Sometimes you're going to feel like you're not getting anything out of your quiet time. The battle of the blahs. Never judge your quiet time by your feelings. Don't depend on your emotions. Emotions come and go. They could be just because you had a bad pizza or something. I have found that if the only time I have a quiet time is when I feel like it, the devil makes sure I never feel like it. In fact, when I don't feel like it, that's when I need it the most.

Possible causes for spiritual dryness.

1) Maybe your physical condition. Maybe you're not getting enough rest. Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is go to bed. Shakespeare said, "It's hard to be a philosopher and have a toothache at the same time." It's hard to have spiritual goose bumps when you're physically worn out. Maybe the feelings are, you're just tired.

2) Disobedience to God. Sin in your life. God is not going to show you something new until you've acted on what He's already shown you. There's no way God's going to say, "I'm going to give you a lot of fresh new insight. You didn't practice what I talked about yesterday."

3) Rushing your quiet time. "Hurry is the death of prayer." Samuel Chadwick said.

4) Getting in a rut. Doing the same thing, the same way, at the same time. When your quiet time becomes a rut you're going to lose your feelings. Vary it.

This six point outline I gave you, I don't use it all the time any more. But I've been having a quiet time for over 20 years. Sometimes I just spend my whole quiet time memorizing. Sometimes I just spend my whole quiet time singing. Sometimes just reading. I vary it simply because I've been having it for so long. I just gave you this outline to get you started.

5) Not sharing insights with others. If you don't give out what God is giving to you you're going to dry up spiritually. It's like the two lakes in Israel. At the top of Israel is the sea of Galilee. It's green, it's fertile, it's alive, they still do commercial fishing in it. Out of the Sea of Galilee comes the Jordan River and the Jordan River then flows into the Dead Sea. The Dead Sea is literally that. There's nothing in it. It's full of brine and salt and there's no living things in it. What's the difference between the Sea of Galilee which is alive and the Dead Sea which is

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dead? The Sea of Galilee receives water from the mountains of Hebron and the northern mountains of Lebanon and it comes in but then it gives out. The Dead Sea only takes in. There's no outlet. If you're always taking in and you never give out, you never share it with somebody else, you're going to be a dead sea.

4. THE PROBLEM OF DILIGENCE

Your greatest problem is going to be your struggle to stay consistent. I've been a Christian now for 30 years and I'm a pastor in full time ministry, yet I find that Satan fights nothing harder than my own personal quiet time. He doesn't fight me on anything else as hard as he fights on a consistent daily time with God. He knows that there's where the power is. Suggestions:

1) Make a covenant or vow to God that you're going to spend fifteen minutes a day.

2) Schedule it on your calendar. I have a To Do list that I print up on my calendar. The first thing on my schedule is Quiet Time, every day. I actually put it on the calendar on my daily To Do list.

3) Be prepared for Satan's excuses. Satan knows if he can keep you out of the Word, he's got you defeated. Dropping your quiet time is usually one of the first steps into backsliding. He's going to give you all kinds of excuses. If you get up in the morning and you don't meet the devil head on, it just means you're going the same direction. Expect it. Realize that the moment you hit the ground, Satan is scheming to keep you out of the Word. He'll think of anything and everything to keep you out of it. Be prepared for it and realize it and plan to fight it.

4) Leave your Bible open at night the night before to the passage you're reading. I've found that a closed Bible on my desk gets ignored. But when I leave the Bible open to where I'm going to be reading the next day, when I get up the next morning, it's a subtle reminder.

What if I miss a Day? Three things: Don't get on a guilt trip. Don't be legalistic. Don't give up.

Don't get on a guilt trip. When the devil comes to you and says, "You didn't have your quiet time today?" Say, "Satan, have you had your quiet time?" He hasn't! You're going to miss. When he comes to condemn you, don't be put down by it.

Don't get legalistic. Just because you've missed a quiet time doesn't mean your whole day has to flop. You live by grace. Confess it and go on living.

Don't give up. How many of you have ever missed a meal? What did you do afterwards? "Oh, poor me! I'm such a lousy excuse for humanity. I can't be consistent. I'm just not going to eat anymore! If I can't be consistent, I'm just not going to try to do it." No. When you miss a meal, eat a little bit more the next time. You make up for it. When you miss your quiet time, don't be blown away by it. "OK, I missed it. Tomorrow I'll spend a little more time." It takes a

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three weeks for you to become familiar with a new task. Then it takes another three weeks for you to make it a comfortable habit. Most people have never made it past the six week barrier of having a quiet time every day. So no wonder they aren't consistent.

Galatians 6:9 *"Let us not get tired of doing what is right. For after a while we will reap a harvest of blessing if we don't get discouraged and give up."*

PRAYER OF COMMITMENT:

Father, I realize I was created to have fellowship with You. Thank You for making this privilege possible through Jesus' death. I know that daily fellowship with You is the most important thing in my life. I now want to commit myself to spending at least some time everyday with You in a quiet time of Bible reading and prayer. I'm trusting in Your strength to help me be consistent. In Jesus' name. Amen.

THE HABIT OF PRAYER

Kay:

"Base your happiness on your hope in Christ. When trials come, endure them patiently; steadfastly maintain the habit of prayer." Romans 12;12

We're going to talk about **HOW TO REVITALIZE YOUR PRAYER LIFE**. As we talked about in the session on quiet time, Jesus died to make a relationship with God possible. Prayer is part of that relationship. Yet for so many people, they're prayer life is dull and boring and something we avoid. So how can we revitalize it?

The first step to revitalize your prayer life is to **APPROACH PRAYER WITH THE RIGHT ATTITUDE**. The passage of scripture that we're going to be looking at is Matthew 6:5-8. v. 5 *"When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, for they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the street corners to be seen by men."*

The first attitude you need to approach prayer with is Be Real. Don't try to impress others as the Pharisees were trying to do. The Pharisees were people who would stand on the street corner, literally and raise their hands and their face to the sky and carry on in this very public way, trying to impress other people. Scripture says don't be like the hypocrites. Don't try to impress other people. Sometimes in group prayer, somebody comes off with a big speel of stuff. You can tell their desire is to impress other people.

Don't try to impress God. Don't pray what you think God wants to hear. Remember He already knows your heart and your thoughts and you're not fooling him. Just speak to Him with what's on your heart.

Secondly, Be Relaxed. v. 6 *"But when you pray go into your room, close the door and pray to*

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your Father who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you." You need to relax, you need to go some place where you can be alone, where you can be quiet and take those deep breaths, and remove distractions and concentrate.

The two main excuses most people give for not praying is that they don't have time and they don't have a place to go. An example: You may have heard of Susanna Wesley, who was the mother of John and Charles Wesley back in the 1700's. Susanna Wesley had 19 children. If anybody had an excuse for not praying... But Susanna would spend an hour every day in prayer. Where does a mother of 19 go to escape? Nowhere! What she would do is take her apron and flip it up over her head and spend an hour in prayer. Her children knew not to disturb her in that time because mother was in her apron praying. Not in her closet but in her apron. If I were in my house with an apron on and flipped it over my head my kids would be sure to know that I had completely gone over the bend. They wouldn't think I was praying. But if Susanna Wesley could spend an hour a day with 19 children and right in the middle of all that was going on, none of us have an excuse. None of us are that busy. Be encouraged that you can find a place to pray everyday.

Be Revealing. v. 7-8 *"Don't recite the same prayer over and over as the heathen do, who think prayers are answered only by repeating them again and again. Remember, your Father knows exactly what you need before you ask Him!"* When you talk to the Lord, just talk. That's what prayer is with the Lord. It's conversation between two people who love each other. When I need something from Rick, I don't come to him and say, "O Thou most honored of men, I need some money for groceries if thou wilt bless it to me." No, I just go, "Hey! I need some money for groceries." I just talk to him because we have a love relationship. When you come to God, be revealing. Tell Him what's really on your heart. Just talk to Him as a dear friend. Approach prayer with the right attitude and secondly...

USE THE MODEL THAT JESUS GAVE TO US. This is out of Matthew 6:9- 15, commonly called the Lord's Prayer. This prayer, Jesus said, *"This is how you should pray"* not what you should pray. He's giving us an illustration of things we should use in prayer, not this specific prayer to pray.

There are **SIX PARTS OF PRAYER** that are revealed in that.

1. PRAISE. I BEGIN BY EXPRESSING MY LOVE TO GOD.

v. 9 *"Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name."* When you come to prayer you want to begin by expressing your love to God. I start by saying to Him, "Lord, I want to focus on You." If I come to prayer focusing on myself and my needs first, I just leave prayer most depressed and frustrated than when I began. But if I come to prayer with the attitude of my focus is upon God, what I can see of Him, what I can learn of Him, what it is that He can show me then I'm going to have the right perspective.

Two kinds of praise we're told to do. First of all is adoration, which is praising God for who He is, His character. And thanksgiving is praising God for what He has done or His deeds. We need to do both of those when we come before the Lord -- thanking Him for who He is and thanking

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Him for what He's done.

Psalm 100:4 says *"Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise. Be thankful unto him, and bless his name."*

HOW TO PRAISE GOD

As you read your Bible and you come across a quality of God that you see, write it down. You've got some prayer guides in your outline: Prayer Guide I and Prayer Guide II. Prayer guide I says there for you to make a list of God's character qualities that you discover and then review them when you're praying. For example if you're reading in Numbers 14:8 it says that God is patient. Numbers 14:8 also says God is merciful, God is forgiving. Write those character qualities down on that particular handout and then review them when you're praying. The key to prayer is God's character. God's character is the basis for answered prayer, making requests. God answers the prayers that acknowledge who He is.

Secondly about praise remind yourself and affirm the promises that God has made that are contained in the meaning of His names. Prayer Guide II. For instance, the prayer guide lists Jehovah- Jireh, Jehovah-Shalom, all kinds of different names of God and each one of those tells us something else about Him. When I focus on the names of God, when I'm upset or worried I start saying, "Lord you are my Rock. You are my Provider. You are my Strength. You are my Peace." Just take the names of God and claim those for myself. It gets the focus off of me and I praise Him and I calm down and I'm able to think about what it is I want to pray about.

Third on praising is make a list of all that you're thankful for and review them when you pray. That's on Prayer Guide 3 for you to record the blessings, the good things God has done in your life. Is it easy to forget the goodness of God? Absolutely! Day by day I forget what He did for me yesterday even though what He did for me yesterday was great by tomorrow sometimes I've already forgotten it. If you'll make a list of the things God has done for you and the ways He's blessed your life, as you pray you can review them. Be grateful. It will surprise you what the Lord's done.

2. PURPOSE: I COMMIT MYSELF TO GOD'S PURPOSE AND WILL FOR MY LIFE.

The next part of the Lord's prayer says, *"Your kingdom come, Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."* This is an acknowledgment that God is God and I am not. Remember Saturday Night live when it first came out. Chevy Chase would stumble across the stage and go, "Hi, I'm Chevy Chase and you're not!" This part of prayer is when you acknowledge that God is God and you are not. At this time in prayer I want to pray for God's will to be done in my family and in my church and among my friends and my city. This is where I tell the Lord, just do whatever You need to do in my life. There's an old song that says, "Whatever it takes for me to draw closer to You, Lord, that's what I'm willing to do." That's what this time is in prayer. God, You do whatever You need to do in my life. Claim Romans 12:2 *"Offer yourself as a living sacrifice*

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to God, dedicated to his service and pleasing to him. This is the true worship that you should offer."

First of all, I come and praise the Lord for who He is and what He's done then I commit myself and say, "You do whatever You need to do in my life, cause You're God."

3. PROVISION: I ASK GOD TO PROVIDE FOR MY NEEDS.

What needs do I pray about? Absolutely every one of them. There is nothing too great for God's power to take care of and there's nothing too insignificant for His concern. So all my needs I'm to pray about.

Philippians 4:19 says *"God will supply all of my needs from His riches in glory because of what Christ Jesus has done for us."* Romans 8:32 *"Since God did not spare even his own son for us but gave him up for us, won't he also surely give us everything else?"* Saving you and me was the hardest thing that God ever did. There was nothing harder that He could do than to save our souls so when we come and ask a request of Him for our personal daily lives it's a piece of cake in comparison.

James 4:2 says *"You do not have because you don't ask of God."* Wishing and hoping for something is not the same as actually specifically asking for something. When you have a need, ask God for it. And be specific. Write down your request with the promise that you're claiming from the Bible and expect God to answer. Look at Guide #4 for specific prayer requests.

A few years ago -- 8 now -- when we bought the house that we're in (this was our first time to buy a house) so we had all these things that we wanted. We figured that the best way to get all the things that we wanted in the house was to ask God for them. So we made a pretty specific request and had a house that we thought was going to work well. When we went to the owner with an offer he just said no, not even a counter offer. He would not even deal with us. We didn't know this man so it's wasn't like he knew anything about us that he could dislike. He just would not deal with us.

We were pretty discouraged with that and continued to pray and became even more specific. "Lord, we would love a view. It would be great if we could have some acreage. A dark room. A spa." We laid all the things out and at a price that we could afford. And pine trees. We got exactly that! We have a third of an acre. We have pine trees. We have a spa. We did have a dark room but has since converted into bedrooms but it was there when we got the house. A view. Everything we asked for, God provided. I'm convinced that part of the reason was that we went to Him and specifically said, "Lord, these are the desires of our heart. We'd love it if you'd take care of it." And He did.

Philippians 4:6 *"Don't worry about anything but in everything by prayer and petition with thanksgiving, present your requests to God."* Why? Doesn't God know what I need? Why do I have to go and talk to Him about it?

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Of course He knows what I need. He knows everything about me before I come to Him. But prayer is my personal declaration of dependence on God. When I come to Him I'm saying, "I'm totally dependant upon You, God. Not because of what I can work for or what I can earn by my smarts or by my industry, but I am totally dependant on You for my needs."

4. PARDON: I ASK GOD TO FORGIVE MY SINS.

This part of the Lord's prayer says, "*Forgive us our debts*". There is four steps to forgiveness:

1) Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal every sin. He's so good to do that. When I come to Him with an honest heart, He will reveal places that there is sin in my life. "*Examine me, O God, and know my mind; test me, and discover my thoughts. Find out if there is any evil in me.*" Psalm 139 says. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal the sin.

2) Confess each sin specifically. Sometimes we like to get away with confession of sin by just saying, "Forgive me all my sins." You committed those sins individually, you better ask for forgiveness individually. None of this blanket coverage stuff. Proverbs 28:13 "*You will never succeed in life if you try to hide your sins. Confess them and give them up. Then God will show mercy to you.*"

3) The third part of forgiveness is to make restitution to others when necessary. Matthew 5:23-24 "*When you remember your brother has something against you, go at once to make peace with him, then come back and offer your gift to God.*" I was with a group of girls I used to sing with in college last year and one of the girls I had not seen in fifteen years came up to me afterwards and said, "Do you remember when..." and she named an incident. I said yes. She said, "It's bothered me for fifteen years that I did that to you. Would you forgive me?" I said absolutely! She said "I feel so much better. For fifteen years it has bothered me that I did not as your forgiveness at the time." So when God reveals something that you've done to someone else make restitution and get it off your conscious.

4) By faith accept God's forgiveness. "*If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins, and purify us from all unrighteousness.*" 1 John 1:9. I listen to talk radio a lot when I'm driving in the car and my kids aren't in there with me and I listen to Dr. David Viscount. While I don't agree with a lot of what he says, he seems to have a gift for being able to penetrate real quickly people's defenses and just kind of get his finger on what's wrong, why they're calling. One day I heard him giving advise to a gal that was crying on the phone saying, "I feel so guilty! What do I do with it? What I did was wrong, what do I do with the guilt?" His response was so inadequate. He said, "You live with it." I wanted to call up and talk with that girl. She needs to know that God can forgive her that that guilt can be wiped out. When we talk about forgiveness you need to accept the fact that you don't have to live with guilt. It can be forgiven and wiped clean.

5. PEOPLE: I PRAY FOR OTHER PEOPLE.

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The Lord's prayer says, "*As we have forgiven our debtors.*" 1 Timothy 2:1 "*Pray much for others; plead for God's mercy upon them, give thanks for all he is going to do for them.*" (Living Bible). An important part of prayer is remembering that God is working in the lives of the people you pray for even when you can't see it. If there's someone you've been praying for, for a long time and you don't see any evidence of change, you want to give up. Forget it. Prayer doesn't really work. There's no point in it. I don't know why I'm wasting my breath. Scripture says pray much and plead for God's mercy. Give thanks for all he is going to do for them. Be assured that whoever it is you're praying for, God is working, even though you can't see the evidence of it. I am never given permission to stop praying for someone. I am to pray until God has either changed me, changed the situation, or changed the person. Keep praying.

If you want to know how to pray for other people look at the prayers of Paul. They're listed on your outline. Read the prayers of Paul and see the kinds of things he prays for people. Most of us run out of ammunition to pray after we've said "bless them" and "help them" -- beyond that we don't know what to say. Look at the prayers of Paul and see what he prayed for other people. Put power in your praying.

Make a list of people you want to pray for. That's prayer Guide #5. Maybe on different days of the week. One day of the week, you pray for your family, the next day for the government, the next day for your friends, the next day for your church. Make a list and spend one day praying for those people every week.

6. PROTECTION: I ASK FOR SPIRITUAL PROTECTION FROM GOD.

v. 13 "*And lead us not into temptation but deliver us from the evil one.*" We, as believers, face a spiritual battle every day and satan wants to defeat us through temptation and fear. If I start every day without praying for God's protection I'm walking into battle unprotected. I'm walking into battle without the spiritual armor we're supposed to put on. Ask God to make you aware of evil in this world. If you're unaware of it, you can get caught by it, you can get involved in it before you even know what's going on. But if you ask the Lord to make you aware of evil and evil, tempting situations, you can fight it.

1 John 4:4 "*The Spirit who is in you is more powerful than the spirit who is in those who belong to the world.*" Don't be afraid. The Spirit who is in us is more powerful than the spirit who is in the world.

I want to close this section by encouraging you to remember that prayer is the only way you can talk to God. God has ways of communicating to us through His word, through creation, through other people, through thoughts that come into our mind. There's numbers of ways that God can communicate with us but the only way that you and I have to communicate to God is through prayer. I encourage you to take these steps to revitalize your prayer life.

Rick:

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We want to now look at the **HABIT OF TITHING OR HONORING GOD WITH MY GIVING**. Why is this one of the basic habits? We're talking about four indispensable habits. There are many good things you can do that are good habits for your Christian life but in this class we're concentrating on the four most important. If you were to get stranded on a desert island and you developed the habit of daily time in the word, daily prayer, weekly giving to God and regular fellowship with other believers, you will grow.

The Bible is a book about giving. The Bible talks more about giving than it does about either heaven or hell. Jesus talked more about giving than almost any other subject. Over half of His parables have to do with money. There are more promises in the Bible related to giving than any other subject.

1 Corinthians 16:2 *"On the first day of every week set aside some of what you have earned and give it as an offering. The amount depends on how much the Lord has helped you earn."*

It says *"the first day of every week"*. Is that a habit? Yes.

HOW GIVING REVEALS MY SPIRITUAL MATURITY

"Just as you excel in everything -- in faith, in speech, in knowledge, in complete earnestness -- see that you also excel in the grace of giving." 2 Cor. 8:7

Let me put this in perspective what the Bible says. In the key words that are used in the Bible, the word "believe" is used 272 times; the word "pray" is used 371 times; the word "love" is used 714 times; the word "give" is used 2162 times. God is a giver and God wants us to become like Him.

WHY GOD WANTS ME TO GIVE -- 7 Reasons

1. GIVING MAKES ME MORE LIKE GOD.

God is a giver and if we're going to be like God, we've got to become givers. The Bible says *"God so loved the world that He gave his only Son."* He loved, so He gave. You can give without loving, but you cannot love without giving. Christians are to be the most giving people in the world because we're to be the most loving people in the world.

2. GIVING DRAWS ME CLOSER TO GOD.

Matthew 6:21 *"Where your treasure is, there your heart is also."* Wherever I put my money shows my priorities. If I put my money in my house, that's where my heart is. If I put my money into eating out, that's where my stomach is! If I put my money into clothes, into a hobby... that's where my heart is.

The question then becomes, Where do you want your heart to be? Wherever you want your heart

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to be, that's where you need to put your money. Where you treasure is, there your heart is also. The fact is, every time you give back to God, you're drawing closer to Him.

3. GIVING IS THE ANTIDOTE TO MATERIALISM.

We live in a materialistic world. What is materialism? It's get. Get all I can, can all I get, sit on the can, and spoil the rest. Get! Get!

What is the opposite of getting? Giving. Giving is the antidote to materialism. The only way I can know if I'm having victory over materialism is am I willing to part with what I've got. 1 Timothy 6:17-18 *"Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to be generous and willing to share. In this way they may take hold of the life that is truly Life!"*

Notice he says, *"Command those who are rich"*. Everybody in this room is rich. Everybody who lives in America is rich compared to the rest of the world. Most of the world would love to have our problems. Most of the world would love to have our bills. They're worried about am I going to have a meal for the next day? Am I going to have a meal for my kids tonight? So this is applying to all of us.

He says *"everything is given for our enjoyment"*. It's OK to enjoy the blessings you've got. You don't need to feel guilty about them. God has blessed you. But he says true living comes from giving. We are commanded to be generous and to be willing to share. We make a living by what we get but we make a life by what we give. We need to model that balance.

4. GIVING STRENGTHENS MY FAITH.

Faith is like a muscle. God uses finances to test your faith. *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding. Honor the Lord by giving him the first part of your income, and he will fill your barns to overflowing."* God says that the way we prove our trust, the way we demonstrate our faith, is by giving the first part of our income back to Him.

Luke 6:38 *"Give and it will be given to you. For with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you."* God says, "I dare you! Try me. See if this works. Let's see if this works. Let's see how much you want Me to bless your life. You give a cup, you get a cup of blessing. You give a bigger cup, you get a bigger cup. You pull up a dump truck, you get a dump truck's worth. The measure you use is the measure you're going to get."

Giving strengthens my faith. The issue why a lot of people don't give is that they just don't believe. They just don't really believe God will take care of them.

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5. GIVING IS AN INVESTMENT IN ETERNITY.

"Give happily to those in need, and always be ready to share whatever God has given you. By doing this, you will be storing up real treasure for yourselves in heaven -- it is the only safe investment for eternity." In light of today's Savings and Loan crises that has excellent application.

You've heard me say many times before, you cannot take it with you but you can send it on ahead. You send it on ahead by investing in people who are going there. It is interesting to me that we live in one of the most affluent counties of the United States and yet Orange County has the lowest per capita giving in the United States. The lowest in America. The average Orange County resident gives less than one fourth of one percent and yet we are in a very affluent area. Why? Because they're investing in everything else except what really counts.

6. GIVING BLESSES ME IN RETURN.

There are so many promises I could have used. There are more promises regarding giving than anything else. *"A generous man will himself be blessed." "A generous man will prosper, he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed." "Good will come to him who is generous."*

7. GIVING MAKES ME HAPPY.

Jesus said, *"There is more happiness in giving than in receiving."*

We don't really believe that verse. If we did, we'd be more interested in giving than we are in receiving. There are two kinds of people in life: There are takers and there are givers. The happiest people in life are not the takers. The happiest people in life are the givers. No man has ever been honored for what he has received. He's honored for what he gives away.

Carl Menniger, one of the top psychiatrists in the nation said, "Giving is a criterion of mental health. Generous people are rarely mentally ill." The more healthy you are, the more unafraid you are to give away. The more you hold things in and are afraid to give away, that's an indication that there's fear in your life.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE TEACH ABOUT TITHING?

What is tithing? Tithe means a tenth part. It's a word that God uses all through scripture. In the Bible, God tells us that we're to give the first ten percent of all we earn back to God. Giving less than ten percent is not tithing. Giving more than ten percent is more than tithing. Tithing means ten. Giving a tithe is giving ten percent of my income.

What's the difference between a tithe and an offering? Tithe is giving ten percent of my income. An offering is anything I give in addition to my tithe.

Why should I tithe? There are eight reasons in God's word.

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1. God commands it.

Leviticus 27:10 *"A tenth of all you produce is the Lord's and it is holy."* Circle "holy". We could just stop right there. God could have said give ninety percent. But He just said ten. Simply because He says it, we ought to obey it. But He does give us other reasons.

2. Jesus commended it.

Not only did God command it, but Jesus commended it. In fact in Matthew 23:23, He commends the Pharisees -- the only thing Jesus ever commended the Pharisees for was their giving. He says that's one thing you guys are doing all right. Everything else you're off base but, in Matthew 23:23, He said, *"Yes, you should tithe, and you shouldn't leave the more important things undone either."* They were tithing, but they weren't doing some other things.

3. Tithing demonstrates that God has first place in my life. Deuteronomy 14:23 (Living Bible) *"The purpose of tithing is to teach you to always put God in first place in your life."* I can say God is first place in my life, but there are two things you can look at that will tell you what is really first place. If you'll look at my schedule and if you'll look at my check book stubs, that tells what's really first place, no matter what I say is first place. The way I use my money and the way I use my time really indicates what's first place in my life.

4. Tithing reminds me that everything was given to me by God. *"Always remember that it is the Lord your God who gives you the ability to produce wealth."* When I sit down every week and write out my check, it reminds me that, "God, everything I have came from You. If it weren't for You, I wouldn't have anything."

5. Tithing expresses my gratitude to God for the blessings He's done for me. Psalm 116:12 *"How can I repay the Lord for all his goodness to me?"* The answer -- Deuteronomy 16:17 *"Each of you should bring a gift in proportion to the way the Lord your God has blessed you."*

6. God says that refusing to tithe is stealing from Him. That's pretty strong but that's exactly what He says. Malachi 3:8-10 *"God says `Will a man rob God? Yet you are robbing me!' But you ask, `How do we rob you?' God says `In tithes and offerings... Bring your whole tithe to my house.'" Not a half of a tithe, a third of a tithe -- the whole tithe. The Bible says that when I use money to pay bills that I ought to be tithing with, then I'm robbing from God. I'm paying bills with God's money. Money, that rightfully God says I'm to give to Him.*

7. Tithing gives God a chance to prove He exists and wants to bless you. This is one of the most amazing promises in the Bible. God actually offers you a challenge and He says I dare you. Start tithing and watch what happens. He not only makes a promise to bless you with more, but He promises to protect what you already have. *"`Bring your whole tithe to my storehouse. test me in this' says the Lord, `and see if I will not throw open the floodgates of heaven and pour out*

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so much blessing that you won't have room enough for it! I will prevent pests from devouring your crops and the vines in your fields will be protected from plagues."

God says, Test me. This is the Pepsi challenge verse of the Bible. There's only one place in the Bible that God says, "You can prove that I exist, one way to prove I exist. Tithe." Why? Why does He choose finances? Of all the areas He could have chosen, as a test, why did He choose finances? Because we spend most of our lives revolving around money. Making it, earning it, saving it, giving it, sharing it, spending it. So God has used this as an acid test. He says, "I dare you! Just see if I won't fulfill the promises I've made regarding tithing."

8. Tithing proves that I really love God. Jesus said, *"If you love me, do what I command."* And it is clearly commanded all the way through scripture. Some people say tithing is Old Testament law. No, it's not. It's an Old Testament principle. In fact, tithing was established before the law was given. The law was established with Moses. God established tithing from the very first. Abraham gave tithes 400 years before Moses was born. It's not part of Jewish law. It is a life principle before the Jewish nation even became Israel.

"I want you to be leaders also in the spirit of cheerful giving. This is one way to prove that your love is real, that it goes beyond mere words." 2 Corinthians 8:7-8

What should I tithe?

The Bible makes real clear that the first part of what I earn, not the leftovers. I saw a bumper sticker the other day, "Tithe if you love Jesus. Anybody can honk!" Do you have more month left over at the end of the money? You run out before the month runs out. The Bible says, *"Honor the Lord by giving him the first part of all your income."* When Kay and I got married we made a commitment right up front. We said whether anybody else gets paid or not in our marriage, God's going to get paid first. We owe everything to Him. The first check that gets written after I get paid is my tithe. We've done that in every year of our marriage and God has been faithful. We haven't always had everything we wanted but we've always had everything we needed and God has never failed us.

When we started this church there wasn't a whole lot coming in. We moved out here on faith. We had no money. We spent the night with friends up in Anaheim because we didn't have enough money for a motel the first night we got here. God has provided for us over and over.

Where should I give my tithe?

The Bible is real specific about this. I should tithe where I worship. The Bible says that I'm to give my tithe wherever I worship. *"Bring your whole tithe into my storehouse."* Malachi 3:10. In the Old Testament, the place of worship was called the Temple. In the New Testament it was called the synagogue or the church. You're to bring your tithe and offering to where you worship God. When you give to United Way, that's fine. But don't kid yourself. That's not tithing. When you give YMCA, that's fine. You ought to. Kay and I support all kinds of groups outside. We sponsor adopted children overseas. That's fine, but that's not tithing. The Bible says tithing

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goes to the place of worship, your storehouse.

When should I tithe?

1 Corinthians 16:2 *"On the first day of every week, set aside some of what you have earned and give it as an offering. The amount depends on how much the Lord has helped you earn."* What

is the first day of every week? Sunday. What do you do on Sunday? You go to the place of worship. That's when you're to give. You're to give at the place of worship.

One of the most common things is you just forget. Keep a ledger book and put in it account number #1 -- My tithe. Since Kay and I got married, I buy a little book for \$1.98 and break up the budget in different accounts. Account #1 is tithe. Account #2 is offerings -- stuff we give to World Vision, James Dobson, etc. When I get a paycheck, the very first thing I do is take ten percent of that amount and write it on that page. Then when I write the check for that tithe I cross it out. If you make \$25,000 a year and you get to the end of the year and you've given less than \$2,500, you don't have to account to me or anybody else, but you do have to explain it to God. God's going to say, "I said tithe." The only way you can do that is if you keep an account where you know exactly what's coming in and what's going out.

I would suggest you use weekly envelopes. I've been a Christian for 30 years but just to remind myself, I keep my box of envelopes on my desk at home, right in front. Even after being a Christian 30 years, I need the visual reminder.

Teach your children to tithe. When your kids aren't even old enough to figure ten percent, the way we've done it in the past is get three little boxes -- "Save", "Give", "Spend". He makes 75 cents -- he gets a quarter to save, a quarter to give, a quarter to spend. Our Matthew isn't old enough to know that he's tithing 33 1/3 percent. It's a visual way to see, "I don't spend all my money". Some of it I give back to the Lord, some of it I save." Teach your children.

GIVE WITH THE RIGHT ATTITUDES.

The Bible says that attitudes are much more important than amounts. That's why God developed tithing. It's the fair thing. God could have said, "Everybody give \$50 a week." For some people, they don't make \$50 a week. For some that's peanuts. It wouldn't be fair if God set an amount. Instead, He says a set proportion.

1. We're to give willingly. God is more interested in my attitude than the amount. 2 Corinthians 9:12 *"For if the willingness is there, your gift is acceptable according to what you have, not according to what you don't have."* It's according to what you have not according to what you don't have. When God looks at our giving, He's not impressed with the amount. He doesn't look at the amount you give, He looks at the amount you have left over, in proportion to what you gave.

1 Corinthians 9:7 *"Each one should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly*

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or under pressure." As your pastor, I want to relieve a little bit of guilt, never give under pressure. The Scripture says you are to never give under pressure. You're to give willingly, not reluctantly. If you feel pressured to give, you can say, "My pastor said I wasn't supposed to give." Because the Bible says if you give under pressure it's not the kind of giving God wants. You don't give to make up a budget deficit, you give because God says so whether the church needs it or not. The issue is I need to give for my own benefit.

2. Give joyfully. *"God loves a cheerful giver."* Bumper sticker: "God loveth a cheerful give but He also accepteth from a grouch." The Greek word for "cheerful" is the word we get our word "hilarious". In the New Testament church, when they gave, it was hilarious. In the modern church today, when you take the offering, that's the low point of the service. If you cannot give cheerfully, don't give. You don't get credit for giving that's not cheerful. If you can't tithe cheerfully, what you need to work on is your attitude. The Bible wants to look at your attitude.

How can you give joyfully when you have so many bills to pay? Whenever I don't feel too joyful about giving I go back and review those six benefits of what it does. It makes me more like God, It draws me closer to God, It's the antidote to materialism, It strengthens my faith, It's an investment for eternity, It blesses me in return, It makes me happy. When I begin to think about the benefits of it, I start getting joyful about it again.

3. Give generously. 2 Corinthians 8:3-4 *"They gave as much as they were able and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service."* This is an incredible church. Paul says they were begging to give. They gave beyond their ability. This is the first financial principle of giving a tithe.

People ask, "What if I can't afford to tithe?" I say, "You can't afford not to." If you want God's blessing on your finances, you need to give. You need to obey what he's said.

4. Give expectantly. *"Remember this: Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly, and whoever sows generously will reap generously."* God says it's like the farmer who sows seed. If a farmer had a tough crop last year and he only has a few seeds does he say, "I can't afford to plant this seed"? He can't afford not to. He's got the choice of either eat it himself or plant it. He can eat it himself and that's going to last one meal. Or he can plant it. God says if you want a big harvest, you plant a lot. If you want a little harvest, you plant a little. How you plant is how you reap, it's up to you?

I'm excited about some of the testimonies we've received. Over 1,500 people since January have committed to the daily habits of a quiet time, a weekly tithe, a regular time of fellowship with God in small groups.

"I signed up to begin tithing this year. I have no idea how it can happen. But Friday after I signed up, I got a new job with more dollars. Praise God, it does work!"

"Praise to God. We decided last week to increase our weekly giving to ten percent after much consideration and prayer. This week I got two job offers -- one for twenty percent increase, one for forty percent increase."

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"In the past six months I started tithing, quit drinking, joined a small group and started listening to Bible on cassette tape. I know the Lord is moving in my life and is about to reveal His plan for my life."

"My husband and I are starting into a new phase of our life. My husband is unable to do the job he's done for seventeen years because of health problems so he's going to be medically retired. Financially we're faced with all kinds of problems. We began tithing last Sunday so we are really stepping out on faith. We need special prayer."

Two months later I get this:

"We really have some praises. We've been tithing now and we're overwhelmed by the things that are happening. Our income was cut in half but somehow we're still even. It's a miracle. Praise the Lord!"

I got an overseas postal letter in the mail for the last three weeks. It came from Australia. I opened it and inside was an offering envelop. A couple in our church was in Europe for three weeks and sent their offering in every week. I don't know if I'd remembered to take my envelopes with me on vacation. That is seriously thinking through your commitment.

Notice it says, "*On the first day of every week...*" Some of you get paid once a month and you like to give once a month. I understand that but just in the last year God convicted me about this verse. I need to give on a weekly basis because it's a weekly reminder. I give the first day of every week to the Lord, I give the first part of my day to the Lord, I give the first part of my money to the Lord on the first day of every week. It's a reminder. God wants me to be reminded more than once a month. I'm not saying you give more, but just figure out what is your tithe for the month and then divide it up in four weeks. If you make \$1000 a month. Instead of writing one check for \$100, give four checks of \$25. What that does is remind you every week. I know some people in our church who are on commission -- real estate -- and they make a big killing then it's feast or famine and nothing happens for three or four months. What they do is take the tithe, put it in an account, and they estimate -- "I'm hoping to make a sale in the next six weeks" and they break their tithe down and give a part of it for the next six weeks. It's a reminder.

THE KEY TO GIVING is in 2 Corinthians 8:5. "*They first gave themselves to the Lord.*" This is really the issue. If God owns me, He's going to own my wallet. If He doesn't own my heart, He doesn't own my wallet. I need to first give myself to the Lord.

Here's a commitment prayer. I want us to bow our heads and I'll pray this prayer. I encourage you to follow me along in it:

"Father, I know You love me and want what's best for me. I recognize that all I have, or ever will have, comes from You. I am more interested in pleasing You than in having possessions. I want You to have first place in my life and I am willing to begin tithing as You have commanded.

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Out of gratitude for all You've done for me and in expectation that You will continue to provide for me, I commit myself to returning at least the first 10% of all I earn back to You. I want to begin investing for eternity. Help me to remain faithful to this commitment. In Jesus' name, Amen.

THE HABIT OF FELLOWSHIP

Hebrews 10:25 is an important verse that any believer ought to understand and spend some time thinking through the implications of this verse. *"Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another."* That's an extremely important concept.

Steven:

WHY IS FELLOWSHIP SO IMPORTANT?

1. I BELONG IN GOD'S FAMILY WITH OTHER BELIEVERS

If you read through the New Testament, you'll notice that the word brothers and sisters and father and children are used quite a few times. It's because there is a familiar relationship between us and our father who is in heaven. In fact, Jesus says of His disciples that you are my brothers. That is an incredible thing. If you have a brother and sister, it's a special relationship. Your Christian brothers and sisters are actually closer in reality than those physical brothers and sisters. We ought to be related to one another in such a way that we can relate as brothers and sisters in the most intimate sort of way -- sharing with one another, praying with one another, caring for one another. We have the same Father. And that Father has drawn us together in one family. We really need each other.

Galatians 6:10 *"Let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers."* That's a pretty strong statement. We need to be focusing on how can we assist one another, how can we relate to one another in that special kind of way as brothers and sisters, especially those who are believers.

Ephesians 2:19 *"You are a member of God's very own family and you belong in God's household with every other Christian."* You belong in the same household. He's our Father. We're His children.

Romans 12:5 *"So in Christ, we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others."* We belong to each other. There's a uniqueness. Yesterday, I closed the car door on my finger. That finger has let the rest of my body know that it exists for the last 24 hours. That's a real significant part of my life right now because it's painful. But in the same kind of way, each one of us, ought and should relate to one another just like the parts of our individual bodies. That is difficult to understand unless you look at the analogy of the hand and the body. We all are part of each other and we need each other.

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Ray Ortland makes this statement, "The Christian who is not committed to a group of other believers for praying, sharing, and serving, so that he is known, as he knows others, is not an obedient Christian. He is not in the will of God. However vocal he may be in his theology, he is not obeying the Lord."

I remember a woman one time who said she knew the Lord Jesus Christ. I asked her where she fellowshiped -- what church did she go to? "I don't believe in church. I commune with God out in nature." That's good to a degree. But I really question whether that person understands what it means to relate to Christ. You cannot relate to Jesus Christ without relating to His church and His children. We are to be one in unity together. Some people have said, "I'm committed to the invisible church." Does the invisible pastor or the invisible deacons come visit when they're sick or hurting?

It's interesting that in the New Testament, the word "church" is used about 100-104 times but 98 times the word "church" is used, it always refers to the local assembly of believers. The emphasis is always on the local gathering of believers not some etherial invisible church but a reality where people actually come together and relate as a family of believers.

2. I NEED ENCOURAGEMENT TO GROW SPIRITUALLY.

I need the support to grow spiritually. You cannot grow healthily alone. We need each other. Hebrews 10:24 *"Let us think of one another and how we can encourage one another to love and good deeds."* Circle "encourage one another". One of the things we need to do as brothers and sisters is to think in terms of what can I do, what can I say to encourage you to do the things that are pleasing to God. I need your relationship to me to encourage me in my walk with the Lord. One of the things that has been important to us in our transition from the other church and hopefully back into full time Christian service sometime is the ministry and fellowship that we've had among the people here at Saddleback. It's been a tremendous encouragement to us as a family. I need it. It's been a real help to us.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, 12, *"Two are better off than one. If one of them falls down, the other can help him up. But if someone is alone and falls it's just too bad because there is no one to help him. Two men can resist an attack that would defeat one man alone. A rope made of three cords is hard to break."*

That reminds me of an event that took place when I was about 15 years old. It was near Ft. Bragg. I have four brothers. We were hiking along the coast. There was a cliff area. I said, "I'm going to go up this cliff." My brothers were smarter and went around where it was safer. I went up alone. They couldn't see me. I got about half way up and the rocks let go and I fell. I slid and dropped about 20 feet in between two huge boulders as the waves were coming in. I landed on my tailbone and I couldn't move for about 15-20 minutes. I thought I was paralyzed. Finally i got up and walked back to where my family had camp. My mom immediately knew something was wrong.

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Being rather of a thick skull, the very next day I climbed another cliff and got just at the top and started to slip and fall. I was sweating bricks at that point. I could not get back up. My brother Jim was up there and he threw me his jacket and helped me up.

We need each other. This cliff was not 20 feet. It was 200. That's a vivid reminder to me of how we need each other. I praise God he was there.

3. I NEED ACCOUNTABILITY TO GROW SPIRITUALLY.

"People learn from one another just as iron sharpens iron." "Everyday keep encouraging one another so that none of you is hardened by the glamour of sin." Sin is glamorous. It smells good, it tastes good. It's when it goes down is when it becomes bitter. We really need to encourage one another that we don't get trapped in the glamour.

"Brothers, if someone is trapped in some sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." What is the law of Christ? Caring for one another.

We can say, "I believe in Jesus." I love Jesus." But what is the real proof of your love for Jesus? Saying that you love Jesus? No, how you love people. That's the reality of your love for Christ.

4. CHRIST IS PRESENT WHEN WE FELLOWSHIP TOGETHER.

He's right here with us. *"For wherever two or three have come together in my name, I am there, right among them!"* I am there with them. I am present, He is saying.

5. THERE IS GREAT POWER WHEN PEOPLE PRAY TOGETHER.

"Whenever two of you on earth agree about anything you pray for it will be done for you by my Father in heaven." That's a beautiful promise. We need to be spending time together praying for this community, for the things that God directs us to pray for.

6. FELLOWSHIP IS A WITNESS TO THE WORLD.

Jesus says, *"My prayer for all of them is that they will be of one heart and mind so the world will believe you sent me."* How does the world know that Jesus was sent? The believers will have one heart. Our unity, our love and care for each other, is a great testimony that Jesus Christ actually came. Is it important that we have this one mind? That we be unified together? Yes, it's key to the gospel.

"Your strong love for each other will prove to the world that you are my disciples." How does the world know that Jesus even exists? It's by the way that we relate to one another.

7. I AM OBLIGATED TO EVERY OTHER CHRISTIAN.

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Why? 1 Peter 4:10 *"God has given you some special abilities [spiritual gifts]; be sure to use them to help each other."* One of the most important things you want to understand about spiritual gifts is that they are a special endowment that God gives to every single person who comes to Christ. That spiritual gift is really for one main person only. A spiritual gift, that special ability God gives to each believer is for the purpose of me ministering to other believers. That is so important. I have an important responsibility that God has given to me to minister to the needs of other people.

1 Corinthians 12:5, 27 *"There are different kinds of service to God. Together you form the body of Christ and each one of you is a necessary part of it."* We need each other.

You see a partial list of the "One Anothers" of fellowship. There are at least 58 times in which the concept of "one another" is used in the New Testament.

Serve one another, Accept one another, Forgive one another, Greet one another, Bear one another's burdens, Be devoted to one another, Honor one another, Teach one another, Submit to one another, Encourage one another. There's a tremendous emphasis throughout the New Testament of that fellowshiping together, of coming together, ministering and serving one another.

HOW CAN A LARGE CHURCH MAINTAIN CLOSE FRIENDSHIPS? Every member needs to be a part of a small group. I love the Sunday service. Great music, great preaching. But it's rather difficult to relate personally to the people around you. But in a small group you can share your real concerns. You can really support one another. You can encourage each other.

Acts 5:42 *"The [the believers] met day after day in the Temple courts and from house to house."* Two types of church meetings: Large group celebration and Small group fellowship.

We come together on Sunday to celebrate the Lord. We go to small groups for us to fellowship, where the "one another's" take place, where we can serve and love and pray and all those things for one another.

Notice how many times (Romans 16:5 and in Acts, etc) where we here the phrase, *"Great the church that meets in their home."* That's really where the church had its growth. At Saddleback, we believe our church must grow larger and smaller at the same time. How can you be accountable to a group of 5000 people? Only when we divide that 5000 down to 10 or 15. Then you can really spend time together and help each other to grow.

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF SMALL GROUPS? Acts 2:42-47 is where we're getting the concepts from that are being used here.

1. *"They devoted themselves to the apostle's teaching."* The first thing we notice about small groups is Bible study. That's exactly what we're doing. When we read the scripture, the New Testament in particular, we're devoting ourselves to the Apostles' teaching because that is the

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Apostles' teaching.

2. *"and to fellowship"*. Fellowship. Someone said the definition of fellowship was two fellows in a ship, rowing together. If you've ever tried to sit side by side in a row boat and coordinate your efforts. If one person rows a little bit more than the other person, you just go in a circle. But if you coordinate your efforts together, you can go fast and accomplish a lot. Fellowship is a coming together in one mind, one purpose, the purpose of bringing honor to Jesus Christ and serving one another. It's relating to one another in a special relationship.

3. Communion. *"and to the breaking of bread"*. Some people have asked when they've come to Saddleback, especially if they've come from a little bit smaller church and outside of Southern California, they say, "Why doesn't Saddleback Valley Community Church take communion every Sunday morning?" There are basically three reasons: One is logistics. We've got thousands of people moving through and it's a logistical nightmare. Second, the strategy of the ministry is to reach unbelievers on Sunday morning. Communion, the breaking of bread, really is an activity of the believers. That's something special for the believers. It would be rather awkward to be passing the juice and the bread to a non Christian and have them participate. That would not be, I think, pleasing and right before the Lord. Third, the New Testament, as you read through some of those passages, you see that communion was something they did from house to house, in the homes. We here, in small groups, encourage communion to take place in a small group setting. In fact, there are many believers who practice that on a weekly basis or once a month in their own homes as a special reminder of what Jesus Christ has done for them.

4. Prayer. Praying for one another. *"Our father, give us our daily bread. Forgive us our debts as we ..."* Notice the plurals throughout. It's interesting that Jesus would choose plurals, rather than saying the singular,

5. Support. I encourage you to read this Acts 2 passage, verses 42-47 and just think in terms of what these believers were doing for one another. They were undergoing persecution? They couldn't purchase food in the bazaars because they were being kicked out of the Jewish community. (That means their Visa Card was canceled!) They had to rely on other believers who had the resources to meet their needs. People were literally selling the things that they had in order to meet the needs of other people. They were supporting financially and physically other believers. Sacrificing to meet their needs.

"They gave to anyone as he had a need." Philippians 4:15 *"You shared with me the fellowship of giving and receiving."* Supporting one another is so important. There has been so many times in the small groups that we've been involved with when someone had a need. They lost their job or something like that and the group would gather around and would do everything they could to meet the needs, the daily food, even paying rent in some cases. I had a friend who didn't have a car -- and you need a car for transportation. Another brother just said, "I believe God wants me to give him a car" and he went out and bought one and gave him one. That's love. That's the way the Christian life ought to be related to one another.

6. Social. *"they ate together with glad and sincere hearts."* Eating is a very intimate kind of

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thing. We do a lot of that around here! Eating is a social event and it was something they did a lot of. We're great on ordering pizza, going to a restaurant, but something we haven't done very often here is we don't have people into our homes. We need to have people into our homes, eating together, relating in a home setting, having friends over, playing some games together and just getting to know each other. Don't worry about the dust!

"get into the habit of inviting guests home for dinner or if they need lodging, for the night."

Romans 12:13 That's a special ministry.

7. Singing or praising. *"Praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people."* They were praising, singing together.

8. Outreach. Touching lives for Jesus. *"and the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."*

Fellowship is an extremely important aspect and habit of the Christian life. I want to encourage each of you to do whatever you can to be involved in some kind of small group or some kind of accountability group where you can begin to use your gifts to encourage people in their personal walk with the Lord as well as you receiving some encouragement for your walk with the Lord.

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Rick:

HOW TO START AND MAINTAIN GOOD HABITS

Since our time is short, I'm going to just give you these words and you can go home and read this section.

Step One is Desire -- First you've got to have the desire, you've got to want to begin the habit.

Step Two is a Decision -- To start a new habit, first you get the desire, then you make the decision. The Bible says, if you wait for perfect conditions you'll never get anything done.

Step Three -- Declaration -- You make a covenant resolution. The power of the vow is awesome. Psalm 76:11 *"Make vows to the Lord your God and fulfill them."* We're going to encourage you tonight to make a covenant vow.

Step Four is Determination -- You never allow an exception until the new habit is securely rooted in your life. It takes seven to twenty-one repetitions to learn something. If you're going to have a quiet time, you've got to do it for about 21 days before you start getting into the sense of it. If you're going to develop the habit of tithing, get into a small group, you've got to go on a regular basis.

Step Five is Do it -- Whenever you feel the slightest urge or prompting a new habit do it then. Don't wait. Seize every opportunity to reinforce your habit. Those feelings won't last, so whenever you feel inclined to perform it, do it. If you're going to start having a quiet time and in the first week three or four times in a day, you've found yourself wanting to have another quiet time -- go ahead. It's ok to have three or four of them in one day. That's ok. Once you get started the more you do it, any time you have the slightest inclination to reinforce a good habit do it.

Step Six is Double Up -- Get a partner who will encourage you and support you. Particularly if you're going to memorize scripture it's great to get a partner. Two are better than one.

Step Seven is Depend on God -- Rely on God's power to help you establish the habit. Remember, Satan does not want you to develop habits that help you grow spiritually. He'll do all he can to tempt you and cause you to slip or discourage you. The Bible says that *"The Spirit God has given us fill us with power, love, and self control."*

"For it is God who is working within you both to give you the will and the power to achieve his purpose."

The very first thing that I said was that the goal of this class was to challenge you to commit yourself to the habits necessary for spiritual maturity."

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The yellow card is Growth Covenant:

I commit to a daily time with God (personal Bible reading and prayer), a weekly tithe to God (giving the first ten percent of my income), and a committed team for God (fellowship with believers in a small group).

On the back:

"Take the time and trouble to keep yourself spiritually fit. Bodily fitness has a limited value but spiritual fitness is of unlimited value for it holds promise both for this present life and the life to come."

These habits that we've talked about today, won't just help you now but they're going to produce eternal rewards. Sign your name to the card. I'll sign it. Print your name and address on the back. If you are ready to make this commitment fill this out and turn it in and I'll do three things with it.

1. I'm going to sign it and I'm going to pray for you and your commitment and we're going to have it laminated so you can carry it with you and remind yourself of the commitment that you've made.
2. I'm going to give your name to a staff member. We've had over 1,500 people sign this card since January, committing to these basic habits. Each one of those people I assigned to a staff member. Then that staff member is to pray for that person for the entire year. We all have our lists. You'll be given a staff prayer partner.
3. About once a quarter, I send out a packet of spiritual growth material to everybody who's made this commitment. We don't mail it to everybody, just to the people who have made the spiritual growth covenant commitment. It involves stuff on how to deepen your prayer life and your quiet time and things like that.

Let's review the five circles of commitment. At the very start I said our goal as a church is that we will have the most spiritually mature and committed church in the nation by the year 2000. We're leading people into levels of commitment. We've talked about that there are five levels of commitment.

At the outer edge of the circle we call that the community. They are all the people in the Saddleback Valley and southern Orange County that we're trying to reach for Christ. The goal of the community is to reach them and move them into the crowd. Those are the people who show up on Sunday morning. In the community we've got all the people in the Saddleback Valley. The crowd is anywhere from 4,000-5,000 people. If everyone who comes to church at Saddleback once a month shows up on one Sunday we'd run about 7,000-8,000 people. There are about 4,000-8,000 in the crowd. The crowd is not a church. But a crowd can be turned into

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a church. The community is not committed to anything, the crowd is simply committed to attendance.

Then we want to help those who are in the crowd to move into the next circle which we call the congregation which is committed to membership. If you've been through Class 101 which you have been if you're in this class, then you're a member of the congregation. You're committed to membership. What I'm encouraging you to do tonight is to move from the Congregation into the Committed which is those who are committed to maturity.

There are about 4000 in the crowd, there are about 2000 in the congregation, there are about 1500 people in the committed who are committed to these basic habits we talk about in the 201 class. Then we have one inner circle we call the Core. The Core are those who are actively involved in ministry in the church. They come to S.A.L.T. once a month. That's our Saddleback Leadership Training for those who have been through 101, 201, and 301 which is the next class I'd encourage you to take and they are active in a ministry. We have about 1000 people in the Core here at Saddleback who are active in some phase of ministry.

Tonight my challenge is I'm inviting you to move into the Committed Circle and say "I want to make a commitment to these basic habits for my own spiritual growth."

Prayer:

Heavenly father, we thank You for these people who've come today, took time out of their schedule to spend a whole afternoon and evening with us. We thank You for Your Word. How practical and relevant it is! I pray that You would help us be committed to make these commitments that would help us grow spiritually of a daily time with You for the rest of our lives, and a weekly tithe to You and to be a part of a committed team for You. We know that when our time and our money and our relationships are under Your control then our life is really under Your control. I thank You for these who are here tonight to make this commitment. In Jesus' name. Amen.