

**Putting Together the Puzzle
of the New Testament**

**Supplemental Bible Studies
With Extra Sections**

New Testament #1

CHRIST'S PRIVATE PERIOD

Few verses speak directly about Matthew, only Matthew 9:9, 10:3; Mark 2:14, 3:16; Luke 5:27-29, 6:13; and Acts 1:13. From this small amount of information, however, we know that Matthew, also known as Levi, works in Capernaum as one of the despised Publicans, better known as tax collectors. The Jews hate them because they cooperate with Rome and collect more tax than the Jews actually owe. After Jesus challenges Matthew to follow Him, Matthew hosts a huge party inviting many of his friends who apparently do not live in a godly manner so they can meet the Lord. Later Jesus appoints Matthew as one of the Twelve disciples.

Remember that the goal of our study focuses as much on letting the New Testament master us as it does on us mastering the New Testament. What then can we learn from Matthew that will help us walk in a manner worthy of our Master?

Matthew's gospel makes many unique contributions to the New Testament. Consider that he, more than any other author, points out how the Lord Jesus fulfills Old Testament prophecies of the coming Messiah. Another unique contribution of Matthew involves his focus on the spoken words of Jesus. The book of Matthew contains five major sermons of the Lord Jesus each one ending with the phrase "when Jesus had finished these words." The five sermons include the famous Sermon on the Mount (chapters 5-7), instructions for the Twelve disciples (chapter 10), parables about the kingdom of heaven (chapter 13), a message on discipleship (chapter 18), and finally what we call the Olivet Discourse (chapters 24-25).

Much of what Matthew wrote could occupy our attention, yet his emphasis on the worship of Christ captures our focus at this point. He stresses this theme at the beginning, middle and end of his book. Let's see what we can learn about this topic and personally apply to our lives.

Read the verses below circling in your Bible each time you see the word worship or worshiped. Then identify who worshiped the Lord Jesus in each passage of Scripture as well as how and why they worshiped Him. Identifying the group may require reading some of the surrounding verses.

Matthew 2:2, 11 _____

Matthew 14:33 _____

Matthew 28: 9 _____

Matthew 28: 17 _____

Each time the Gospel according to Matthew uses the word “worshiped” in the verses above, it uses the same Greek word. Referring if necessary to the earlier “How?” section, what do you remember about the original meaning of this word?

Putting the original meaning of the word worship together with the demonstrations of the above groups people as they worshiped the Christ, what conclusions can you reach about how to worship the Lord Jesus?

True worship, however, consists of far more than just outward actions. It involves the heart. Read Matthew 15:7-8. How did the people of God in this passage often worship the Lord?

What did they leave out of their worship? _____

What did the Lord call them as a result? _____

Read Matthew 2:1-8. Who in this verse epitomizes the above moniker? Why? (You may need to read Matthew 2:13 and 16 to find the reason.)

So what have we learned from Matthew? Genuine worshipers of the Lord Jesus not only express outward displays of devotion, but also do so with an inner attitude of sincerity. The motivation of their worship can vary. The magi worshiped the Lord because of His

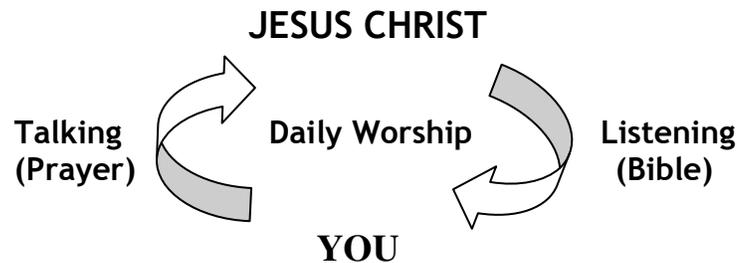
position; the disciples in the boat respond to Christ's power over the sea; the women and the disciples in chapter 28 worship out of an appreciation for the person of Jesus the Christ.

What then can we apply to our lives? In order to grow spiritually, we must not limit our worship of Christ to Sunday morning during a church service. We should also seek to worship Him on a daily basis. Godly men and women call this daily worship time by different names: quiet time, time alone with God, morning watch, and devotional time.

Regardless of the name, this daily worship time includes two main ingredients. First, allow time for the Lord to speak to you by reading from His Word, the Bible. If you have not made this your practice in the past, use the reading assignment in the "For Next Time" section below. Remember though that when it comes to reading the Bible, a little bit every day profits more than a lot just once a week.

The second aspect of this worship time involves talking or rather praying to the Lord. Talking to the Lord falls into three major categories: talking about myself, talking about others, and talking about Him. We will look at these three categories in more detail in chapter four on the Trials Period of Christ.

Putting the above together means we should devote at least a few minutes every day to reading the Scriptures and praying.



In order to worship Jesus Christ more consistently and effectively on a daily basis, answer the following questions.

When each day and for how long will you worship Jesus Christ? If in the past you have not made this a daily practice, start with only five minutes since lifestyle changes can prove difficult. You can always add more minutes in the future.

Where will you go to spend this time alone worshipping the Lord? Having a specific place aids consistency.

Finally, *what* will you do during this devotional time? It helps to know what you plan to do to worship Christ, not to rob the time of spontaneity, but to avoid wasting time trying to determine how you want to spend the time.

Spending time every day worshipping the Lord Jesus becomes the first of eight steps which will help you grow in your relationship with God. We will add an additional step each chapter.

EIGHT STEPS TO GROW SPIRITUALLY
1. Spend time every day worshipping Jesus Christ.

We end our study of Matthew’s emphasis on worshipping Jesus Christ with a verse from the Old Testament. Psalm 27:8 says, “When Thou didst say, ‘Seek my face,’ my heart said to Thee, ‘Thy face, O Lord, I shall seek.’” As we mature spiritually we will focus less on seeking the hand of God (God give me ...) and more on seeking His face (God I love You!). We become consumed with what gives Him the pleasure, glory, and honor.

A LITTLE EXTRA

The New Testament contains Gospels by four different authors, but why? Though they all agree on their subject, each writer offers a unique perspective on the life of Christ. Notice, however, that the first three Gospels have much more in common with one another than with John’s Gospel since they deal with the humanity of Christ as He ministers in Galilee. For this reason we refer to the first three Gospels as the Synoptic Gospels.

FOUR GOSPELS WITH FOUR PERSPECTIVES

	MATTHEW	MARK	LUKE	JOHN
INITIAL AUDIENCE	To the Jews	To the Romans	To the Greeks	To all people groups
PORTRAYAL OF CHRIST	As the King	As the Servant	As the Son of Man	As the Son of God
FOCUS ON CHRIST	His Humanity	His Humanity	His Humanity	His Deity
BOOK’S ARRANGEMENT	By Topic	By Time	By Time	By Time
GEOGRAPHICAL EMPHASIS	Galilean Ministry	Galilean Ministry	Galilean Ministry	Judean Ministry

tone of book	Prophetic	Practical	Historical	Spiritual
Old Testament Quotations	53	36	25	20
Unique Features	5 sermons	Most action	Most parables	7 miracles and 7 "I am's"
Date Written	During the 60's	Late 50's to early 60's	During the 60's	During the 70's or 80's
Place Written	Probably in Syria	Rome	Uncertain	Ephesus
Author's Occupation	Tax Collector	Missionary	Physician	Fisherman

Taken together the four vantage points result in a fuller picture of the Messiah as you can see in the above chart.

New Testament #2

CHRIST'S PUBLIC PERIOD

In the last chapter we focused on Matthew, the first of eight authors of the New Testament. Here we shall consider Mark. Only ten direct references speak about this second writer of the New Testament: Acts 12:12, 25; 13:5; 13:13; 15:37, 39; Colossians 4:10; Philemon 24; II Timothy 4:11; and I Peter 5:13. Many historians add Mark 14:51-52 as another indirect autobiographical reference about this second New Testament author. Let's see what we learn about **Mark** from these eleven verses.

If Mark writes about himself when describing the young man who escapes naked in Mark 14:51-52, then he witnesses the arrest of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. The first direct reference, however, occurs about 14 years after the crucifixion. After the Apostle Peter miraculously escapes from a Jerusalem prison one night through the aid of an angel having recently been incarcerated by Herod Agrippa, he goes directly to the house of Mary the mother of John Mark (Acts 12:12) where he seems to expect to find believers. This passage provides insight into Mark's background. It reveals that he comes from a wealthy family because of the size of his mother's house with its upper room, outer gate and servant, Rhoda. Some believe John Mark's house possibly served as the location of the last supper of Jesus with His disciples and/or the upper room where the disciples prayed at Pentecost.

Shortly after this event Barnabas, who happens to be his cousin, and the apostle Paul take Mark with them to Antioch, Syria after leaving an offering for the believers in Jerusalem to bring relief from a famine (Acts 12:25). A couple of years later Mark accompanies Barnabas and Paul on a missionary trip to Asia Minor which we know as Turkey to serve as a helper (Acts 13:5), but deserts them (Acts 13:13). A few years later in the early 50's when Barnabas wants to take Mark with him on a second missionary trip (Acts 15:37-39), Paul refuses to let him accompany them which results in Paul going to Turkey and Barnabas taking Mark to minister on the island of Cyprus.

At some point Mark and Paul reconcile their relationship because we find Mark with Paul in Rome during Paul's house arrest in the early 60's (Colossians 4:10, Philemon 24). In the years just prior to the house arrest Mark writes his fast-moving, action-packed gospel (he uses the word "immediately" over 40 times) from the same city. Not long after Paul's house arrest the Apostle Peter writes his first epistle from Rome in which he mentions Mark's presence (I Peter 5:13) and refers to him as his son suggesting that Peter may have led Mark to place his faith in Christ.

The last reference which refers to Mark (II Timothy 4:11) comes at the end of the Apostle Paul's life when he requests Timothy to get Mark and for the two of them to come see him in prison before the Romans execute him.

Now that we know more about Mark, what can we learn from him to encourage our spiritual growth? Whereas Matthew concentrates on people worshipping Christ, Mark

places his focus on people following Christ. To better understand the point Mark wants to make, take a few minutes and investigate the verses below.

Write beside the appropriate verse the person or persons Mark identifies as following Jesus.

Mark 1:16-20 _____

Mark 2:13-15 _____

Mark 3:7-8 _____

Mark 5:24 _____

Mark 6:1 _____

Mark 10:46-52 _____

Mark 15:40-41 _____

Great multitudes follow Christ from all over Palestine. “Following after” Christ, however, did not make them “followers of” Christ. Mark notes in chapter four that Christ speaks in parables to the crowds following Him, but only explains the meaning of the parables to His true followers. (See Mark 4:1-2, 10-11, especially verse 11.)

So what makes one person a follower “after” Christ and another person a follower “of” Christ? Mark gives the answer in chapter eight. Read Mark 8:34-38. Read this passage and write the answer below using your own words.

It costs a person everything to become a genuine follower “of” Christ, but the resulting blessing proves worth the sacrifice. Mark records a powerful example of this truth in 10:17-31.

In verses 17-18 a man approaches Jesus and asks Him a question. What does he want to know?

To answer the man, Jesus begins to list the Ten Commandments, but lists only the commands dealing with how a person should act toward man. He doesn’t mention any of

those dealing with how a person should act toward God. Read Mark 10:18-19 and then on the chart below make a mark beside each of the commandments Christ quotes.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

TOWARD GOD	SCRIPTURE	COMMANDMENT
“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, and mind.” Mt. 22:37	Ex 20:3, Deut 5:7	1. You shall have no other gods before Me.
	Ex 20:4, Deut 5:8	2. You shall not make for yourself an idol.
	Ex 20:7, Deut 5:11	3. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.
	Ex 20:8, Deut 5:12	4. Remember the Sabbath to keep it holy.
TOWARD MAN “You shall love your neighbor as yourself.” Mt. 22:39	Ex 20:12, Deut 5:16	5. Honor your father and your mother.
	Ex 20:13, Deut 5:17	6. You shall not murder.
	Ex 20:14, Deut 5:18	7. You shall not commit adultery.
	Ex 20:15, Deut 5:19	8. You shall not steal.
	Ex 20:16, Deut 5:20	9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
	Ex 20:17, Deut 5:21	10. You shall not covet.

How does the man respond in verse 20 to Jesus’ answer? _____

The Lord now focuses once again on the Ten Commandments. Look back at the above chart. What does the Lord tell Him to do and to which command does Jesus refer in verse 21?

How does the man respond this time? See verse 22? _____

Jesus’ love (verse 21) motivates Him to reveal to the man the issue keeping him from becoming a genuine follower “of” the Lord as opposed to just following “after” the Lord. The epistle of I John 2:15 gives a clue to the real passion of the man’s heart. “Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.” If the rich man had admitted his need and asked for Christ’s help, he would have received the eternal life that he sought since Christ was more than simply a good teacher (verse 17) as the man initially confessed Him to be.

His conversation with the man, however, astonishes the disciples who ask in verses 23-26, “Then who can be saved?” The Lord clarifies that a person receives eternal life from God, not by keeping the Ten Commandments or by any other human effort (verse 27). The Ten Commandments show a person’s need to be right with God (eternal life) by pointing out where a person falls short in his relationship with God.

Peter then makes a confession in verse 28. What does he say and how does it compare to Jesus’ statement in Mark 8:34-37?

How does Peter’s commitment to Christ differ from the rich man’s commitment? _____

How does Jesus answer Peter in verses 29-31?

Let’s summarize what we have learned from Mark. A genuine disciple of Christ denies himself, takes up his cross daily and follows Christ. This statement does not mean that genuine followers of Christ act perfectly. If this were true, then the disciples in the above passage would not have been amazed and astonished by the words of Jesus. It does mean, however, that a genuine follower of Christ seeks to submit daily to the Lordship of Christ. When a genuine follower finds out what Jesus wants, he seeks “immediately,” as Mark might write, to put it into practice. We could define a genuine follower of Christ in this way, as someone desiring to obey instantly the lordship of Christ.

If you want to grow spiritually, you need to take inventory of your life. Do you deny yourself in order to obey the Lordship of Christ? Are you willing to take up your cross, an instrument of extreme suffering, in order to follow Jesus? Do you take **discipleship** seriously?

Do you have any area in your life not totally submitted to the lordship of Christ? If so, what will you do and when will you do it? _____

Following the lordship of Christ costs everything, but the reward proves worth it. As Jesus said in Mark 10:29-30, “Truly I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children ... for My sake and for the gospel’s

sake, but that he shall receive a hundred times as much now in the present age, ... and in the age to come, eternal life.”

Let’s add a second step to our spiritual growth chart.

EIGHT STEPS TO GROW SPIRITUALLY
1. Spend time every day worshiping Jesus Christ.
2. Submit every day to the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Psalm 40:8 says, “I delight to do Thy will O my God; Thy law is within my heart.”

A LITTLE EXTRA

During the Public Period of Christ, the Lord Jesus calls and trains many servant-leaders to follow Him so that after His death they could take the message of God’s love and forgiveness to the nations. Luke 10 speaks of Jesus sending out as many as seventy at one time. Yet He had an inner group of disciples known simply as the Twelve.

Scripture contains four lists of the names of the Twelve: Matthew 10:2-4, Mark 3:16-19, Luke 6:14-16, and Acts 1:13-16. Each list mentions Simon Peter first and Judas Iscariot last. Each list also divides the Twelve into three groups of four. The chart below provides biographical information from both Scripture and tradition on each of Christ’s disciples as Mark lists them in his gospel.

THE TWELVE DISCIPLES	
NAME	INFORMATION
Simon, also called Peter	From Bethsaida in Galilee; married with a home in Capernaum; worked as a fisherman; after Christ called him, he became the leader and spokesman for the Twelve; part of an even smaller core group of three present with Jesus during His transfiguration and while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane; imprisoned for his faith more than once; initiated evangelism among the Gentiles; wrote I and II Peter; according to tradition Rome crucified him upside down because he considered himself unworthy to die as Christ did
James the son of Zebedee	Worked as a fisherman with his younger brother John in partnership with Peter and Andrew; lived in Capernaum; part of an even smaller core group of three present with Jesus during His transfiguration and while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane; the first of the Twelve to suffer martyrdom when King Herod Agrippa executed him with a sword
John the brother of James	Initially a disciple of John the Baptist; along with his older brother James known as the “sons of thunder;” part of an even smaller core group of three present with Jesus during His transfiguration and while praying in the Garden of Gethsemane; witnessed the crucifixion; entrusted with the care of Jesus’

	mother; in later life moved to Ephesus where he suffered persecution through banishment to the island of Patmos; wrote the Gospel of John, I, II, III John, and the Revelation to John
Andrew	From Bethsaida in Galilee; worked as a fisherman in Capernaum; initially a disciple of John the Baptist; after he met Jesus he immediately introduced his brother, Simon Peter, to the Messiah; later he brought to Jesus the boy with the loaves and fish as well as certain Greeks; according to tradition he suffered crucifixion in Achaia (Greece)
Philip	From Bethsaida; met the Lord soon after Christ's return from the wilderness; brought Nathanael (Bartholomew) to Christ; considered prominent among the Twelve since Scripture always lists him fifth; possibly preached in Phrygia and died at Hierapolis (both in Turkey)
Bartholomew	From Cana in Galilee; called Nathanael in the Gospel of John; brought to Christ by Philip; tradition suggests that Bartholomew carried the Good News of salvation to India and suffered martyrdom when placed in a sack and thrown into the sea
Matthew	Also known as Levi; the son of Alphaeus; a tax collector in Capernaum; hosted a reception for Christ in his house; authored the Gospel of Matthew
Thomas	Also called Didymus which means twin; an important character in the Gospel of John; bravely persuades the other disciples to follow Jesus back to hostile Judea even if it meant dying; remembered for doubting the resurrection of Jesus unless he could touch the wounds but famously confessed "My Lord and my God" when Jesus appeared to him; tradition claims he preached the gospel in India
James the son of Alphaeus	Little known about him; called James the Less probably because of age or stature in order to distinguish him from James the brother of John; tradition hints that he suffered martyrdom from stoning
Thaddaeus	Luke calls him "Judas son of James" when he identifies the Twelve both in his gospel and in his Book of Acts; perhaps went by the name Thaddaeus in order to avoid the stigma of the name Judas; little else known of him
Simon the Zealot	Previous to following Christ he belonged to a faction called the Zealots who bitterly opposed Rome and its taxation of the Jews
Judas Iscariot	The only one of the Twelve not from Galilee; served as treasurer for the disciples from whom he stole; betrayed Christ in the Garden of Gethsemane for thirty pieces of silver; regretted his decision and hung himself in remorse; Jesus called him a devil and the son of perdition

New Testament #3

CHRIST'S TRIALS PERIOD

For someone who wrote twenty percent of all the chapters in the New Testament, it may surprise you to discover that only three verses mention Luke by name: Colossians 4:14, II Timothy 4:11, and Philemon 1:24. Yet in spite of such a paucity of references, we can learn quite a bit about the author of two of the longest books in the New Testament: The Gospel According to Luke and The Acts of the Apostles, otherwise known as the books of Luke and Acts.

THE WRITINGS OF LUKE	
Luke	Details the Coming of Christ Era
Acts	Details the Going of the Church Era

Continuing our practice, let's learn first what we can about the person of Luke and then what we can apply from his writings that will enhance our spiritual growth. We can make four observations about Luke.

First from Colossians 4:14 we know Luke works as a medical doctor and we can assume he uses his training to mend Paul's wounds after his beating for delivering the Philippian slave girl from the spirit of divination (Acts 16:22-24). From this same passage in Colossians we also know that Luke is Gentile and not Jewish. As Paul closes his letter to the Colossians (4:10-11) he sends them greetings from three of his companions: Aristarchus, Mark (Barnabas' cousin), and Justus. All three of whom Paul describes as the only fellow workers with him from the circumcision, in other words Jewish. Paul then highlights other companions presumably not from the circumcision and includes Luke (Colossians 4:12-14). We find another clue that supports our belief that Luke is Gentile from Acts 1:19. In this verse Luke makes a revealing comment describing Aramaic, the Hebrew dialect spoken during New Testament times by the Jewish people, as "their" language.

Philemon 1:24 allows us to make a third observation about Luke. This Gentile physician serves as a fellow worker with the Apostle Paul. A number of other passages allow us to conclude that Luke served in this capacity for many years. If you carefully read the book of Acts, you will notice that in three places Luke changes from third person plural (they) to first person plural (we) indicating Luke's presence during some of the events he describes (Acts 16:10-17, 20:5-21 and 27:1-28:16). As we will see later, a couple of years after Paul's release from house arrest the Romans throw Paul in prison again and this time execute him. During this last imprisonment Paul writes II Timothy. In this letter Paul states that only Luke remains with him. Putting the bits and pieces together, we see that Luke co-labors with Paul from Paul's second missionary journey until Paul's death.

Finally, we observe that Luke writes his two volume series from the perspective of a historian. The recipient of his work, Theophilus (Luke 1:3, Acts 1:1), which means either lover of god or loved by god, probably does not represent a real name in order to protect

the recipient, though it probably does represent a real person since Luke calls him “most excellent,” a title reserved for people of high rank in Roman society (Acts 24:2-3, 26:25). In the introduction to his gospel (1:1-4), Luke explains to Theophilus that he wants him to know the exact truth about the things of Christ so he investigated everything carefully and laid out his findings in consecutive order. He shows this attention to historical detail in passages like Luke 2:1-2 about the birth of Christ and Luke 3:1-2 about the beginning of John the Baptist’s ministry.

Knowing now what we know about Luke, we might tend to think someone trained as a physician and who thinks like a historian would focus so intently on intellectual matters that he might overlook the deeper issues of the heart. Not Luke! Actually he strongly stresses the spiritual side of the Christian life. Previously we found Matthew emphasizes worship and Mark hammers away at submitting our lives to Christ’s ultimate lordship. Here we find our third author, more than any of the other eight New Testament authors, highlighting **prayer**, perhaps the most intimate of all spiritual endeavors. Let’s see how we can grow more in our relationship with Christ by considering some of the passages Luke wrote about prayer in his gospel.

You will find with each set of verses below not only a set of questions to answer, but also a space to note how you might apply to your life what you read. When appropriate jot down something that you can specifically put into practice regarding your prayer life.

Read Luke 5:16. How frequently did Jesus pray? _____

Application: _____

Read Luke 6:12. How long did Christ pray on this occasion? _____

For what purpose do you think Jesus prayed? See Luke 6:13-16. _____

Why do you suppose that He needed such an extended time of prayer? _____

Application: _____

Read Luke 6:28. This verse belongs to the famous Sermon on the Mount. For whom does Jesus say we should pray?

How should we pray for them? Read verses 27-36. _____

How easy for you is it to pray this way for this kind of person? _____

Application: _____

Read Luke 18:1-5. What parable does Jesus teach in verses 2-5? _____

What lesson about prayer does Jesus want to teach from this parable? See verse 1.

Application: _____

Read Luke 22:39-44. Describe the situation in these verses. _____

What event will soon occur? _____

Describe the intensity of Jesus' praying. _____

What is Christ's primary request? _____

How does God answer Him and why does He answer in this way?

What is Jesus' response to God's answer? _____

Application: _____

We can learn a lot about prayer from the above study, but the question remains: do we really know how to pray? In the "Who?" section of the Private Period of Christ we learned that prayer makes up part of worshiping Christ. Yet we may feel like we have not succeeded very well at actually praying since that time. Don't worry. The disciples felt the exact same way. So much so that in Luke 11:1 one of the disciples asks Jesus to teach them to pray. The Lord responds by giving what people have come to call the Lord's Prayer (Luke 11:2-4), but we could perhaps more accurately describe it as the disciples' prayer since Jesus intended for them to pray it. A fuller version of this prayer can be found in Matthew 6:9-13.

As special as it feels to corporately pray the Lord's Prayer, we must realize that Christ gave it as a model. Each time we pray we don't necessarily need to recite the Lord's Prayer verbatim, but we should seek to use it for direction for our own personal prayers. The prayer contains three guidelines that will help us avoid those awkward times of not knowing what to say.

Guideline #1: Talk to God about Himself. *Father, hallowed be Thy name* (Luke 11:2). The word hallowed means holy and sacred. When we pray we should spend time praising God for all that His name represents and thanking Him for what He has done for us. If you have trouble thinking of how to praise Him, try reading a Psalm to Him or reading the verses of a praise song or hymn to Him. Remember, He concerns Himself with the attitudes of our heart more than the words of our mouth. To get in the habit of thanking Him, recall the various ways He has blessed you.

Guideline #2: Talk to God about other people. *Thy kingdom come* (Luke 11:2). This aspect of the Lord's Prayer refers to the worldwide acknowledgement of the lordship of Christ. The Lord wants us to pray that His rule extend to the ends of the earth beginning with those around us. So how do we practically pray for the coming of God's kingdom? We pray that people enter into a personal relationship with Christ and diligently seek to

grow in that relationship. We can pray this way on two levels, locally and globally. Make a list of those among your family and friends for whom you want to pray on the local level. Each day think of a specific need to ask God to meet for them. On a global level, pray for God’s will to be accomplished concerning the major news story of the day or maybe pray for the missionaries you may know.

Guideline #3: Talk to God about yourself. *Give us each day our daily bread. And forgive us our sins, for we ourselves also forgive everyone who is indebted to us. And lead us not into temptation* (Luke 11:3-4). After talking to God about Himself and other people, take time to talk to God about your own needs. By instructing us to pray for our daily bread, Jesus invites us to spend part of our time asking God to meet our physical needs. Yet He doesn’t want us to stop there. He also mentions asking God to forgive us when we disobey Him and pray that we can avoid future temptations. In other words, He also wants us to pray about our spiritual needs. As we grow in our relationship with the Lord, we will find our prayers focusing more on our spiritual needs than on our physical needs. This change in emphasis demonstrates marked progress in our spiritual growth.

Which of these three guidelines helps you the most and why? _____

Adding to our spiritual growth chart gives us a third daily step to take in our spiritual journey in order to become the godly man or woman He desires us to become.

EIGHT STEPS TO GROW SPIRITUALLY
1. Spend time every day worshiping Jesus Christ.
2. Submit every day to the lordship of Christ.
3. Talk to God every day about Himself, others and myself.

May Psalm 5:3 reflect the commitment of our own hearts as we daily talk to God about Himself, others and ourselves. “In the morning, O Lord, Thou will hear my voice; in the morning I will order my prayer to Thee and eagerly watch.”

A LITTLE EXTRA

We developed a chart on pages 77 & 78 showing the questions different factions asked the Lord Jesus on Tuesday (Luke 20). This chart leads us to the question: who are these various groups since we do not find any of them in the Old Testament? To better understand these various groups, let’s look at three different aspects of Palestine’s society: civil authorities, political alignments, and religious affiliations.

From the civil perspective, two authorities enforced the rule of law in Palestine: the Roman governor and the Jewish Sanhedrin. You may recall from the Private Period of Christ that the Romans govern on three different levels: imperially, regionally and

locally. During the Trials Period of Christ’s life Pontius Pilate as governor administrated Judea and Samaria on a regional level, but delegated the local, day-to-day civil affairs to the Jewish Sanhedrin. Pilate’s regional duties included maintaining order and collecting taxes. To maintain order he had at his disposal highly trained soldiers. To collect the revenue necessary to run the empire the Romans appointed publicans or tax-gatherers from among the Jews like Zaccheus in Luke 19:1-10. Their close association with the Roman occupiers and their tendency to extort caused great hatred for them by the Jews. On the local level, the Sanhedrin primarily governed the Jews by enforcing the Old Testament Law. This civil authority consisted of the current High Priest and seventy other elders or leaders, collectively called the Supreme Council.

SIX NEW TESTAMENT FACTIONS

	GREATER ROMAN COOPERATION	LESSER ROMAN COOPERATION
TWO CIVIL AUTHORITIES	The Roman governor (with his soldiers and tax-gathers)	The Jewish Sanhedrin (with its High Priest and Supreme Council)
TWO POLITICAL ALIGNMENTS	Herodians	Zealots
TWO RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS	Sadducees	Pharisees

Politically two major alignments existed. The Herodians supported the descendents of Herod the Great. During the Trials Period of Christ, one of Herod the Great’s sons governed Galilee and Perea, and another ruled over Ituraea and Trachonitis. Since Rome appointed these members of Herod’s family, it comes as no surprise why Herodians favored cooperation with Rome. On the complete opposite end of the political spectrum we find the Zealots. This political party fiercely opposed the Roman occupation and diligently sought to overthrow its domination.

The third aspect of Jewish society brings us to the major religious affiliations of that day, the Sadducees and Pharisees, both of which began during the second century BC. The Sadducees came mostly from the aristocratic priestly class and controlled the temple whereas the Pharisees drew their members from among the common laity and primarily controlled the synagogues. You can see some of the major differences between the two groups in the chart below, many of which we find summarized in Acts 23:8.

SADDUCEES	PHARISEES
Comprised of aristocrats	Comprised of laymen
Fewer scribes (lawyers) were Sadducees	More scribes (lawyers) were Pharisees
Prioritized the written Law (Torah)	Prioritized the oral Law (Tradition of the Elders)
Did not believe in angels, miracles, the	Believed in angels, miracles, the

resurrection of the body, and immortality of the spirit	resurrection of the body, and immortality of the spirit
Primarily influenced the priests	Primarily influenced the masses
Fewer in number than the Pharisees	Greater in number than Sadducees
The temple served as their power base	The synagogues served as their power base
Accepted Greek cultural influence	Rejected Greek cultural influence

In summary we can identify most of the groups found in the Gospels by considering the civil, political and religious aspects of Jewish society during Jesus' day. Each of the three aspects contained two competing groups, one favoring Roman occupation more than the other. With the exception of the Zealots, each of the above groups, whether motivated by theological dogma or fear of losing power, considered Jesus a threat and, therefore, vehemently opposed Him, often setting aside their differences to do so.

New Testament #4

CHRIST'S TRIUMPHANT PERIOD

Having looked at Matthew, Mark and Luke in the previous chapters, we now come to **John**. What does the Scripture teach us about him?

Interestingly, we know a lot about his family. Born to Zebedee and possibly Salome, he grew up a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee with James (Mark 1:19), a brother later martyred by sword at the command of Herod Agrippa (Acts 12:2). If we compare Matthew 27:56, Mark 15:40 and John 19:25, it appears Salome may have been the mother of James and John and also the sister of Jesus' mother making James and John relatives of Jesus. The family seems to have achieved a fairly high level of success because their business uses hired servants (Mark 1:20) and has connections with the High Priest in Jerusalem (John 18:15) possibly through a business relationship if the family sells their fish in Jerusalem. (Magdala, a city south of Capernaum near where James and John work, pickles fish. The Greek name for the city actually means "fish-pickling place." Pickling would keep the fish from spoiling in the unrefrigerated heat of Palestine as the fishermen transport their catch the three day journey from the Sea of Galilee to the huge market in Jerusalem.)

Maybe on one of these trips back and forth from Capernaum to Jerusalem, John meets John the Baptist while the prophet preached in Bethany beyond the Jordan River (John 1:23-28). Though not the most direct route, this detour to and from Jerusalem would not have seemed unusual if John took the Roman road to the east in order to avoid going through the unfriendly province of the Samaritans, a practice common for the Jews of that day.

Realize that during those days religious people had their favorite Bible teachers just like many people today. Except in that culture, the teachers, called rabbis, taught only from the Old Testament since God had not yet given the New Testament. John 1:35 tells us that at some point John had become a disciple of John the Baptist. During one of his visits to listen to his favorite rabbi, John hears John the Baptist identify Jesus as the Lamb of God. From that day on, John becomes a follower of Jesus.

We see John's devotion to the Messiah when we consider that Scripture mentions him as the first of the twelve apostles to follow Jesus and the last to leave Him after the Messiah's arrest at the Garden of Gethsemane. Instead of fleeing with the other disciples, John along with Peter follow Christ all the way to the court of the High Priest (John 18:15). Only John of all the apostles attends the crucifixion, an action extremely dangerous for any male follower of this Man accused of wanting to overthrow Caesar (John 19:26,27). John also arrives first at the empty tomb after hearing Mary Magdalene's report (John 20:4). Not only that, but he first recognizes Jesus as He stood on the beach while the seven apostles fished (John 21:7).

In the years following Christ’s ascension into heaven, John becomes a leader of the fledgling church in Jerusalem (Galatians 2:9). Later he moves to Ephesus located in modern day Turkey where serves as bishop and later suffers persecution when the Romans under Domitian exile him to the island of Patmos. Upon his release tradition says that John returns to Ephesus where he dies around the end of the first century.

John’s walk with his Lord radically changes his life and character. John begins his walk with Jesus as a hot-headed, arrogant young man wanting to call down fire on the Samaritans (Mark 3:17, Luke 9:54-56) and sit at Christ’s hand (Mark 10:35-38). Yet as he follows Christ, he becomes known as the apostle of love.

Whereas Matthew and Mark wrote one gospel each and Luke wrote one gospel and the Book of Acts, John pens five different books of the New Testament: the Gospel of John, his three epistles titled I, II and III John, and Revelation.

WRITINGS OF JOHN
The Gospel of John
I John
II John
III John
Revelation

John’s gospel contains several unique characteristics. All but four chapters take place during a Jewish feast which provides important clues as to when events occur during the ministry of Christ. The four chapters which do not occur during feasts focus on individuals: John the Baptist in chapter one, the woman at the well in chapter four, Lazarus in chapter eleven and Peter in chapter twenty one. The gospel of John also uniquely focuses on the words of the Lord Jesus Christ by highlighting nine times that Jesus elaborates on the phrase “I am,” a clear reference to being God (Exodus 3:13-14).

NINE STATEMENTS (WORDS) IN JOHN’S GOSPEL	
I am He	John 4:26, 8:24, 13:19
I am the bread of life	John 6:35
I am the light of the world	John 8:12, 9:5
I am the door of the sheep	John 10:7,9
I am the good shepherd	John 10:11,14
I am the Son of God	John 10:36
I am the resurrection and the life	John 11:25
I am the way, the truth and the life	John 14:6
I am the true vine	John 15:1

Anyone, however, can claim divinity. Words are cheap unless backed up by actions. Jesus even concedes this point. That’s why He says to one of His disciples in John 14:10-11, “Do you not believe that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me? The words that I say to you I do not speak on My own initiative, but the Father abiding in Me does His works. Believe Me that I am in the Father, and the Father in Me; otherwise believe on

account of the works themselves.” But what works? In his gospel, John highlights seven miracles in addition to the resurrection itself.

SEVEN SIGNS (WORKS) IN JOHN’S GOSPEL	
Turns water into wine	John 2:1-10
Heals the royal official’s son	John 4:46-54
Heals the lame man	John 5:1-9
Feeds the 5000	John 6:1-14
Walks on water	John 6:16-21
Heals the man blind from birth	John 9:1-11
Raises Lazarus from the dead	John 11:1-44

John clearly echoes the words of Jesus (John 10:37,38) when he declares in John 20:30-31 that he wrote about these miracles so that we might believe Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that by believing we might have life in His name.

Let’s now transition from focusing on mastering the Word of God to focusing on the Word of God mastering us. What can we learn from the apostle John?

Take a look at the following chart where we identify the reasons John wrote two of his five New Testament books. In his gospel John clearly communicates his desire for people to have eternal life by believing in Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Yet he doesn’t stop there. In his first epistle he goes a step further. He not only wants people to have eternal life, but also he wants them to confidently know that they have it. In other words, he wants them to have an assurance that they now possess a right relationship with God through their faith in Christ. Let’s see how this applies to our lives.

BOOK’S TITLE	BOOK’S PURPOSE
The Gospel of John	But these (signs) have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name. (John 20:31)
The First Epistle of John	These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, in order that you may know that you have eternal life. (I John 5:13)

Most people in the United States when asked about their religious affiliation will respond that they belong to the Christian faith. The thinking goes something like this: Since I am not a Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist or animist, I obviously must be a Christian. They provide proof by explaining that they may occasionally attend a worship service, pray in certain situations, and even give some money to the church. Yet, if somehow we could ask the Lord whether our friend or family member truly possesses a personal relationship with Him, we might hear Him quote Matthew 7:21-23, “Not everyone who says to me ‘Lord,

Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven...." Why? Because an eternal difference exists between cultural Christians and biblical Christians.

A *cultural Christian* mistakenly thinks a person receives eternal life by doing something for God like joining the church or getting baptized. Or the cultural Christian makes the error of thinking that if he can only be good enough, then hopefully God will allow him entrance into heaven. Yet the Bible clearly states that good works no matter how many, how often or how great will never get anyone into heaven (Ephesians 2:8-9, Titus 3:5, II Timothy 1:9).

A *biblical Christian*, however, realizes that a person gets into heaven by trusting Christ to make him right with God. He understands that he doesn't achieve eternal life. He receives it as a free gift from God (Romans 6:23).

The apostle John explains how a person inherits eternal life in the most famous verse in the world, John 3:16. In this verse the Lord Jesus says to Nicodemus, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life." This verse summarizes the Good News of God's love and forgiveness in four statements. The first deals with God's purpose, the second with man's problem, the third with God's remedy and the last with man's response. The following chart organizes John 3:16 into these four categories. To help you remember them, think "Up, down, up, down."

THE GOSPEL SUMMARIZED		
Up	God's Purpose	For God so loved the world
Down	Man's Problem	Should not perish but have eternal life
Up	God's Remedy	That He gave His only son
Down	Man's Response	That whoever believes in Him

Many cultural Christians insist that they believe in Jesus. Yet the word "believe" in our English language has two meanings: believing from the head and believing from the heart. The Greek word for believe in John 3:16 refers to the latter connotation.

AN ETERNAL DIFFERENCE	
Cultural Christians	Believe in Jesus Christ only with their heads
Biblical Christians	Believe in Jesus Christ also with their hearts

Sometimes though even biblical Christians struggle with doubts as to whether they genuinely believe in Christ. They wonder where they will spend eternity when they die. When a Christian loses confidence in his relationship with God, it negatively affects both his walk with the Lord and his ability to minister to other people. It makes sense then why the apostle John not only wants people to have eternal life, but also wants Christians to have an assurance in the realness of their relationship with God. For that reason he wrote the Epistle of I John.

The small book of I John contains a great deal of spiritual truth in it. John details eight characteristics of biblical Christians. If you demonstrate these eight evidences, then you can have assurance of your relationship with God. John presents these descriptors in a unique pattern: if this is true of you inwardly, then this will be true of you outwardly. Or putting it more accurately, if your position is (fill in the truth), then your experience should be (fill in the practice). Let's identify the truths and practices John uses to describe a genuine believer.

Read I John 2:3-4. Notice the positional truth in verse three. A biblical Christian has "come to know Him." John did not say a real Christian knows *about* God. You can know a lot about the president of the country, but you cannot know the president personally until someone introduces you to him. Same with God. When we truly believe in Christ, we get to know God personally. So what practice I John 2:3-4 does John say will describe your life when you know God? What does this practice look like in your life?

Read I John 2:5b-6. John presents the positional truth as "abiding in Him." To understand what it means to be in Christ, think in terms of the vine and the branches metaphor that Jesus uses in John 15:4-5. For a branch to show evidence of life, it must possess a vital connection with the vine. Believing in Christ establishes such a connection between Him and you. What corresponding practice in verse six does John mention? What does this practice actually mean? What additional insight does I John 3:6 give you?

The verses in I John 2:9-11 discuss our position as no longer in darkness, but now abiding in the light. What do you think light represents? Check out I John 1:5-6 for a hint. What practice does John stress will characterize our lives if we abide in the light?

In I John 2:23 you discover that when you believe in Christ you receive the Father, meaning that nothing stands between you and God. Previously to trusting in Christ, your

sin separated you from God and you had no relationship with Him. Now, however, you possess a parent-child relationship with Him. Now when you disobey God, your disobedience damages your fellowship with God, but not your relationship with Him. In other words, when you disobey God after receiving eternal life, God remains your Father; you just don't feel close to Him any more. That closeness or fellowship does not return until you admit what you did offended the Father's heart and you ask Him to forgive you.

SIN FOR A NON-CHRISTIAN	The non-Christian's sin breaks the Law of God.	Affects his relationship with God	Believing in Christ begins the relationship and fellowship with the Father
SIN FOR A CHRISTIAN	The Christian's sin breaks the heart of God.	Affects his fellowship with God	Asking forgiveness restores the fellowship with the Father

What practice does John write will describe our lives in verse 23? How have you demonstrated this practice lately?

Take a look at I John 2:29. This verse declares that positionally a biblical Christian is born of God. Remember what Jesus told Nicodemus in John 3:3? People born only once, die twice: physically and spiritually. People born twice, physically and spiritually, die only once: physically. What practice does John present in this verse that should characterize our lives? What does this practice look like in your life?

We find another position-practice combination in I John 3:14. John describes our position as having passed out of death into life. What evidence does John repeat that we should find in our lives when we transition from spiritual death into spiritual life?

I John 3:19-21 describes true believers in Christ as belonging to the truth. The preceding practices focused on outward evidences that characterize someone who possesses eternal life. This time John highlights inward evidence. What does John highlight in verse 21? How have you experienced this evidence in your own heart?

I John 3:24 and I John 4:12-13, 15-16 declare perhaps the most amazing positional truth. When we believe in Christ, God Himself comes to live inside of us! The God who created the universe takes up residence in our lives. Hard to imagine, much less comprehend. Yet what evidence do we have to substantiate this incredible fact? As with the evidence above, John again discusses internal evidence. What member of the Trinity lets us know that God abides in us? How does this member of the Trinity let us know that God abides in us? Read Romans 8:9-16, especially verse 16 for the answer.

Like we said, this little book of the Bible contains a lot of truth. Which of these characteristics give you the greatest confidence that you have eternal life? Why?

Using the above verses as well as othes from I John, let's compile what we have learned in the following chart. Notice that John mixes the position/practice combinations.

THE BELIEVER'S POSITION	THE BELIEVER'S PRACTICE
Knows God (2:3-4, 3:6, 4:7)	Obeys God's commandments (2:3-4, 3:24)
Abides in God (2:5-6, 3:6, 3:24, 4:13-16, 5:20)	Walks as Christ walked (2:5-6)
Abides in the light (2:9-11)	Loves other Christians (2:9-11, 3:10-11, 3:14-15, 4:7-12, 4:16)
Has the Father (2:23)	Confesses Christ (2:23, 4:15)
Born of God (2:29, 3:9, 4:7, 5:1, 5:18)	Practices righteousness (2:29, 3:6-10)
Passed out of death into life (3:14)	Does not practice sin (3:6, 3:9, 5:18)
Belongs to the truth (3:19)	Heart does not condemn him (3:19-21)
God lives in him (3:24, 4:12-13, 4:15-16)	Possesses the Holy Spirit (3:24, 4:13)

We can now add a fourth spiritual growth step to our chart. To grow into the godly man or woman He desires, we must daily rest in the Bible's assurance that we have eternal life because we have truly believed in Jesus Christ as the Son of God.

EIGHT STEPS TO GROW SPIRITUALLY
1. Spend time every day worshiping Jesus Christ.
2. Submit every day to the lordship of Christ.
3. Talk to God every day about Himself, others and yourself.
4. Rest every day in the assurance of your relationship with God.

As Psalm 23:6 says, "Surely goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever."

A LITTLE EXTRA

The resurrection of Jesus serves as the linchpin of Christianity. Remove the resurrection and the wheels come off our faith. Everything falls apart. As the Apostle Paul put it in I Corinthians 15:13-14, "But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain." Perhaps because the resurrection of Christ serves as the foundation of our faith, people have attacked its credibility from the beginning. Let's look at **three common theories** given to discredit the empty tomb and submit a corresponding rebuttal.

Within hours of the resurrection, the chief priests bribe the soldiers who had guarded the gravesite of Jesus to tell anyone who might ask about the empty tomb that the followers of Christ stole the body of Jesus while they had slept (Matthew 28:11-15). Interestingly, the chief priests seem to believe the soldiers' report that Christ had risen since the religious leaders never question the soldiers' truthfulness. Yet how do we respond to the assertion that someone may have stolen the body of Jesus? First, it seems doubtful that a motley group of ex-fishermen who did not yet comprehend Christ's prediction that He would rise from the dead would dare try to sneak past four of the most highly trained soldiers on the face of the earth. But even if they tried to do so, how could they move the stone without waking the sleeping guard? Consider, too, that any soldier found sleeping on duty suffered death as punishment. Yet suppose for a moment that the soldiers did all fall asleep and someone managed to remove the stone without waking the guard. How then would the guard know who stole the body if they indeed slept? The fact that the chief priests never charged the disciples with the theft points to the weakness of their case. Ultimately, the martyrdom of so many of the disciples proves that they did not steal the Lord's body. Few people will die such horrendous deaths just to perpetuate something they know to be false.

Others propose that though the disciples obviously did not steal the body of Christ, perhaps others may have. Well who then? If the Jews or Romans stole the body, they could have easily produced it at any point and immediately squelched the fledgling Christian movement. And why would professional grave robbers select to rob a tomb guarded by so many soldiers when they could more safely target a different site? Though

at first the stolen body theory seems valid, upon closer inspection it lacks any strong logical evidence to support its claim.

Another reason given to undermine the credibility of the resurrection subscribes to the notion that the women in the darkness of early morning go to the wrong tomb and mistakenly conclude that Christ had risen from the dead. This line of reasoning proves faulty for several reasons. The women had visited the tomb just 36 hours earlier when they watched Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus place the body of Jesus in the tomb (Matthew 27:59-61). Yet if they did go to the wrong tomb, then certainly Peter and John did not in turn run to the wrong tomb. Besides Jesus' body lay resting in a private tomb, few other tombs surrounded it. Even if they also went to the wrong tomb, surely the tomb's owner, Joseph of Arimathea, knew the tomb's location. So this second theory to destroy Christianity's foundation finds itself also wanting of any weighty support.

THREE INADEQUATE THEORIES FOR THE EMPTY TOMB
Someone stole the body of Jesus
The women went to the wrong tomb
Jesus did not die but merely passed out

A third reason given to discredit the resurrection of Christ explains the empty tomb by declaring that Jesus never actually died, but passed out on the cross and later in the tomb regained consciousness. When He reunited with His followers, He appeared to them as though He had risen from the dead.

Possible? Let's see. Recall for a moment all that Jesus would have had to endure before making it to the sanctuary of His tomb. He would have survived a beating, a scourging, and a crucifixion. Hardly possible. For the sake of the argument, however, let's suppose that He did. How then could someone so traumatized wiggle free of the linens that tightly bound his entire body including His arms and legs? And why would someone in such critical condition take the time to neatly fold His grave clothes (John 20:6-7)? Finally, how could anyone with nail pierced hands and feet remove the heavy stone, overcome the four guards, and walk all the way back to the disciples and appear as the giver of eternal life? Believing such a scenario borders on believing in the miraculous, which begs the question: why not just believe in the miracle of the resurrection?

Only one adequate reason explains the empty tomb. Paul states it in I Corinthians 15:20, "But now Christ has been raised from the dead." We confidently believe this declaration, not just because we can easily refute claims to the contrary, but also because of all the positive evidence. Think about it, every time you send an email, the date bears witness to the arrival of our Lord. The reality of Jesus Christ (His life, death, burial and resurrection) ranks as the most documented fact in all of human history. Now that's a confidence builder.

New Testament #5

CHURCH'S PRIVATE PERIOD

In the previous four chapters we learned about the writers of the Gospels: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Now we turn to Peter who along with Paul serves as a pillar of the early Church. We will look first at his life and writings, and then we will see what we can apply to our lives in order to grow in Christ-likeness.

The Bible goes into quite a bit of detail about Peter. Over 200 verses refer to him by one of his three names: Simon, his Jewish given name; Cephas, the Aramaic name given to him by the Lord Jesus; and Peter, the Greek translation of Cephas meaning “rock.”

From these verses we know a lot about his immediate family. We know his father carries the name of Jona or John since Jesus refers to Peter as Simon Barjona (Matthew 17:16). Bar means “son of,” much like the surname Johnson or “son of John.” Peter makes his living as a fisherman with Andrew his younger brother, possibly in partnership with James and John, the sons of Zebedee. Originally from Bethsaida, he lives in Capernaum with his wife (Matthew 8:14). After Pentecost he apparently moves to Jerusalem (Galatians 2:1,9) until he begins his missionary journeys. While on these missionary trips, his wife travels with him (I Corinthians 9:5).

Scripture also provides a tremendous amount of information about Peter's relationship with the Lord. Andrew first introduces him to Christ in Judea where John the Baptist ministers (John 1:40-42). Approximately a year later while fishing on the shores of the Sea of Galilee Peter has another encounter with Jesus. Jesus commands Peter to follow Him and become a fisher of men. Peter along with Andrew, James and John, leaves everything and begins an incredible life-long adventure of following the Son of God (Luke 5:1-11). A few months later, Jesus calls Peter to serve as one of the Twelve apostles (Luke 6:13-14) of which he soon becomes the spokesman and leader.

Apart from Judas' betrayal of Jesus, few actions of the apostles have become as famous as those of Peter. Christians around the world learn about trusting the Lord by reading of Peter walking on the water (Matthew 14:28-31). Peter utters the confession “Thou art the Christ the Son of the living God,” (Matthew 16:16-18) upon which Christ builds His Church. He insists that even if he has to die with Christ that he would not deny Him (Mark 14:31), though he denies his Lord at least three times. Peter races to the empty tomb the moment he hears Mary Magdalene's report (John 20:4). He dives off the boat and swims to shore when the seven disciples recognize the risen Lord Jesus standing on the beach (John 21:7).

After walking with his Master and being filled with the Holy Spirit, Peter soon epitomizes the name that Christ had given him. His commitment to Christ becomes “rock-solid.” He serves as the first leader of the Church in Jerusalem. His passionate sermons spread the message of God's love and forgiveness to thousands (Acts 2:41, Acts

4:4). The Jewish religious authorities repeatedly imprison him (Acts 4:3, 5:18, Acts 12:4) and beat him (Acts 5:40), yet his faith remains unshakable. Ultimately, his love for the Lord Jesus leads him to the cross (John 21:18-19) where tradition says that he asks the Roman soldiers to crucify him upside down because he felt unworthy to die as Christ had died.

Peter serves not only as a preacher, but also as a writer penning the two epistles that bear his name: I Peter and II Peter. Together the two small books consist of only eight total chapters. The first book gives special attention to troubles coming from outside the Church in the form of persecution of the growing Christian movement. The second book deals more with troubles taking place inside the Church caused by the heresy taught by false teachers.

WRITINGS OF PETER		
I Peter	Focuses on troubles outside the Church	Endure hardships
II Peter	Focuses on troubles inside the Church	Eliminate heresy

We can summarize the first epistle of Peter in four words: salvation, submission, suffering and service. Peter exhorts his readers to grow in respect to salvation by longing for the pure milk of the Word of God (I Peter 2:2). In the second part of his book he deals with submission in the realms of government, business and marriage. He takes suffering in this life for granted, but explains that we must suffer for doing right rather than for doing wrong (I Peter 3:17). Finally, Peter implores the elders of the Church to serve by properly shepherding the people of God (I Peter 5:2). Throughout the book Peter uses the term “precious,” a term that refers to the incredible value of something. He describes as precious: our faith (I Peter 1:7), Christ’s blood (I Peter 1:19), Christ as the living cornerstone (I Peter 2:4-7), and a gentle spirit (I Peter 3:4).

OUTLINE OF I PETER	
Salvation	1:1-2:12
Submission	2:13-3:12
Suffering	3:13-4:19
Service	5:1-14

In his second epistle Peter first traces the path to Christian usefulness and fruitfulness. He goes on to warn against the destructiveness of heresy. Finally, he explains the delay in Christ’s return.

OUTLINE OF II PETER	
Description of spiritual growth	Chapter 1
Danger of false teachers	Chapter 2
Day of Christ’s return	Chapter 3

Moving from seeking to master the Word of God to letting the Word of God master us, we must ask what we can learn *from* Peter not just *about* Peter. For ages men have asked the question: Why do bad things happen to good people? The Book of Job, possibly the oldest book in the Bible deals at length with this troubling issue.

So the question of the righteous suffering has occupied the minds of people for thousands of years. Peter tackles the issue, but narrows the topic to Christians suffering for living righteously and gives some practical advice on how to respond. His close-up perspective of Christ's scourging and crucifixion coupled with his own times of suffering through imprisonments and beatings qualify him as an expert on the subject.

What consolation can you take in patiently enduring unjust suffering due to your relationship with Christ? Read I Peter 2:19-20.

Why does your suffering find favor with God? Read I Peter 2:21.

Describe the example of Christ's suffering from I Peter 2:22-24 that you should follow.

What practical steps contained in I Peter 3:13-16 should you take in order to prepare for suffering?

Why does God allow you to suffer? See I Peter 4:12.

What does I Peter 1:6-7 say will result from your testing assuming you respond to it correctly?

So how should you respond in the midst of suffering? Read I Peter 4:13.

Note the best insight you received about suffering for the sake of righteousness.

What can you specifically apply to your life from Peter's insights on suffering?

Though not the easiest assignment, suffering for righteousness does represent one of the most powerful ways God uses to grow us in Christ-likeness. The pain causes rapid and deep spiritual growth as we focus on the Lord Jesus and the example that He set for us to follow.

EIGHT STEPS TO GROW SPIRITUALLY
1. Spend time every day worshiping Jesus Christ.
2. Submit every day to the lordship of Christ.
3. Talk to God every day about Himself, others and yourself.
4. Rest every day in the assurance of your relationship with God.
5. Focus joyfully on Christ in the midst of suffering for righteousness

Whenever suffering comes, may our heart's cry reflect Job's words to his wife when he said in Job 2:10, "Shall we indeed accept good from God and not accept adversity?" Let's add this fifth step to our spiritual growth chart.

A LITTLE EXTRA

During this period of the Going of the Church, God fills the followers of Christ with the promise of the Father. As we have seen, they already know about the topic of the Holy Spirit, and not just from the Book of Joel. The Old Testament (notice we said Old not New Testament) mentions the Holy Spirit by name 78 different times. Adding personal pronouns that refer to the Holy Spirit (like He or Him) further increases that number.

Interestingly, the Old Testament mentions the Spirit of God before it does the coming Messiah. Genesis 1:2 speaks of the Spirit of God moving over the surface of the waters.

When the promise of the Father finally arrives in the upper room, the New Testament greatly increases the frequency of references to the Holy Spirit. In fact the Book of Acts alone mentions the Spirit 55 times apart from personal pronouns. The Trinity consisting of God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit becomes prominent. All eight New Testament authors refer to all three members of the Trinity; with the exception of James, all do so at least once in a single passage.

NEW TESTAMENT AUTHORS AND THE TRINITY			
Matthew (Mt 28:19)	Father	Son	Holy Spirit
Mark (Mk 1:9-11)	Voice from heaven	Jesus	Spirit
Luke (Lk 1:35)	Most High	Son of God	Holy Spirit
John (Jn 14:26)	Father	My name	Helper, Holy Spirit
Peter (I Pt 1:2)	God the Father	Jesus Christ	Spirit
Paul (I Th 1:3-5)	Our God and Father	Lord Jesus Christ	Holy Spirit
James (Jm 1:1, 4:5)	God	Lord Jesus Christ	Spirit
Jude (20-21)	God	Lord Jesus Christ	Holy Spirit

With all the attention given to the Holy Spirit in Scripture, surprisingly many people do not realize all the roles that the Holy Spirit performs for the Christian. In the chart below you will discover ten actions detailed in Scripture taken by the Holy Spirit. Five of these actions affect your position before the Father God and happen only once in your Christian journey. Yet five of them deal with your experience and can occur repeatedly in your walk with the Lord Jesus.

TEN ACTIONS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT		
POSITIONALLY	Regenerates (births again) your spirit	Titus 3:5
	Lives inside (indwells) your body	I Corinthians 3:16
	Secures (seals) your future	Ephesians 1:13, 4:30
	Guarantees (pledge of) your inheritance	Ephesians 1:14
	Places (baptizes) you into the Church	I Corinthians 12:13
EXPERIENTIALLY	Assures you of your salvation	Romans 8:16
	Illumines your mind to Scripture	I Corinthians 2:12
	Helps (comforts) you during suffering	John 14:16
	Guides your decision-making	John 16:13
	Controls and empowers (fills) your life	Ephesians 5:18

The Holy Spirit performed the first five actions at Pentecost in the lives of the disciples as they prayed in the upper room. The Spirit also performed at least the fifth of the above experiential actions when He filled them on the day of Pentecost.

Today as followers of Christ we also should daily experience the filling of the Holy Spirit. Numerous churches teach the important step of living our lives for Christ, stressing our loving obligation to confess to God any time we disobey Him and then to

recommit our lives to following Christ's Lordship (control). Unfortunately, for various reasons, many churches do not teach the corresponding step of letting Christ live His life through us by the enabling power of the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18). As we resist trying to live the Christian life in our own fleshly efforts and trust instead for the Spirit to fill us with His power we soon find ourselves manifesting the fruit of the Holy Spirit stressed in Galatians 5:22-23, "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control," rather than the deeds of the flesh found in Galatians 5:19-21, "immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these."

Putting these two steps together (control – living our lives for Christ; and power – letting Christ live His life through us) constitutes what the Bible calls in Galatians 5:16 "walking in the Spirit." Here's how this works. If we disobey God we take the first step by confessing our sin and rededicating our lives to the Lordship of Christ. But we shouldn't stop there. Next we need to ask for the Holy Spirit to fill us, acknowledging that we cannot live the Christian life the way our heavenly Father desires apart from the Spirit's enabling power. Putting these two steps in the form of a prayer would look something like this:

Dear Lord Jesus, my disobedience was wrong. I am very sorry for hurting You. Please forgive me. Lord Jesus I resubmit my life to Your control. I know that consistent victory over sin is impossible in my own strength. I will trust the Holy Spirit to fill me with His power to enable me to live the life that honors You. If I ever take back the steering wheel (control) of my life, or trust in my own abilities (power), immediately I will again take these two steps of living my life for You and letting You live Your life through me. In Jesus name I pray, amen.

The rest of the Book of Acts highlights this action of the Holy Spirit. You will find the followers of Christ repeatedly trusting God's Spirit to fill them with His power so they might effectively proclaim the Good News of God's love and forgiveness to the nations.

New Testament #6

CHURCH'S PUBLIC PERIOD

The Apostle Paul represents our sixth New Testament author. We can easily remember the first four writers because the first four New Testament books, the Gospels, bear their names: Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. We can remember the next two authors, Peter and now Paul, when we realize that the first half of the book of Acts (chapters 1-12) focuses primarily on Peter's leadership and the second half of Acts (chapters 13-28) concentrates primarily on Paul's leadership.

The New Testament provides us with a great of detail about the Apostle Paul. Much of it already covered in the sections above, particularly the "HOW" section. The next chapter on the Trials Period of the Church will give us even more. For this reason let's limit ourselves here to gain an overview of the spiritual journey he follows as God changes him from Saul the persecutor of Christians to Paul the planter of churches. Four passages of Scripture guide our investigation: two about his life before he meets Christ, one on how he meets Christ, and one on his life after he meets Christ.

In just two short passages, Acts 22:3 and Philippians 3:5-6, we can discover much about Paul's life before he met Christ. His Jewish parents, who trace their lineage to the tribe of Benjamin, have him circumcised on the eighth day after his birth in Tarsus, Cilicia. As an adult he becomes a Pharisee after the famous rabbi, Gamaliel, educates him in Jerusalem. After watching the stoning of Stephen (Acts 7:58) he persecutes believers by forcibly dragging them to prison.

Acts 9 graphically describes Paul's conversion. On his way to persecute believers in Damascus, a flash of heavenly light blinds him. Falling to the ground he hears the Lord Jesus speak to him. His companions lead him by the hand into the city where he spends three days without eating or drinking until Ananias finds him. After Ananias prays for him, Saul (Paul) receives his sight and becomes a believer evidenced by his baptism.

PAUL'S SPIRITUAL JOURNEY		
Before meeting Christ	Acts 22:3 Phil 3:5-6	Born in Tarsus of Cilicia Jewish Circumcised the eighth day Grows up in Jerusalem Educated under Gamaliel Becomes a Pharisee Persecuted the Church
While meeting Christ	Acts 9:1-18	Blinded by a heavenly light Hears the Lord Jesus speak to him Enters Damascus Waits 3 days without eating or drinking Meets Ananias who prays for him Receives his sight and becomes a believer

		Baptized by Ananias
After meeting Christ	II Co 11:24-28	Receives thirty nine lashes 5 times Beaten with rods 3 times Stoned with rocks 1 time Shipwrecked 3 times Spends a day and a night in the ocean Exposed to constant danger Experiences hunger and thirst Exposed to cold weather Burdened by concerns for the churches

We already know the impact Paul’s church planting activities has on the spread of the gospel among the Gentiles, but what kind of price does he have to pay during this third advance of Christianity? Second Corinthians 11:24-28 vividly recounts the external and internal costs of his missionary activity. Five times the Jewish people give him 39 lashes. Three times he receives beatings with rods and once a pelting with rocks. Three times the ship on which he sails wrecks and one of those times he has to spend a day and a night in the ocean either swimming or perhaps in a small boat until someone rescues him. Traveling constantly exposes him to a variety of dangers including surviving in the wilderness and avoiding thieves. Additionally he knows the pain of hunger, thirst and cold weather. Even in safe and comfortable surroundings he still has to carry the inner burden of concern for the purity and protection of the fledgling churches he has planted. Definitely not the life he envisioned for himself as he traveled the road to Damascus.

In the midst of such an incredible life, the Apostle Paul finds the time to write half of the books of the New Testament. We know he writes at least thirteen books and, if he wrote the book of Hebrews, the total reaches fourteen. The following chart which excludes the book of Hebrews shows when he wrote each of the thirteen epistles.

THE WRITINGS OF THE APOSTLE PAUL	
WHEN	WHAT
Written after his first missionary journey	Galatians
Written during his second missionary journey	I Thessalonians II Thessalonians
Written during his third missionary journey	Romans I Corinthians II Corinthians
Written during his first Roman imprisonment	Ephesians Philippians Colossians Philemon
Written during his release from prison	I Timothy

	Titus
Written during his second Roman imprisonment	II Timothy

Let's now consider what we can learn *from* the Apostle Paul as we determine how we can grow in our own spiritual journeys. If we know John as the apostle of love and Peter as the apostle of hope, then no one deserves the title the "apostle of faith" more than Paul. In the 87 chapters of Scripture contained in his thirteen epistles, he uses the words faith, believe(s), believed, believing, believer(s) 199 times. That averages over two times per chapter. Paul sees faith as the only way to receive God's offer of salvation. Though we find the teaching of righteousness through faith in the Old Testament (Habakkuk 2:4), Paul makes the teaching crystal clear. Let's look at passages from ten of his thirteen epistles and see what his writings have to say about the role of faith in our relationship with God.

What does Paul say about people in Romans 3:9-12?

Describe the ultimate consequences of disobeying God found in II Thessalonians 1:8-9.

Do you think it seems fair that people who disobey God suffer these consequences? Do you think it seems just? Give a rationale for your answers to both questions.

Read Romans 3:5. How does Paul's question in this verse compare to the question directly above? Read Romans 3:6. How does Paul answer the question?

Do people know that they need reconciling with God? See Romans 1:18-20 for Paul's take on this question.

In Scripture, a “justified” or “saved” person has a right relationship with God. Read the following verses and describe how man tries to justify or save himself in order to remedy the problem in his relationship with God:

Galatians 2:16 _____

Ephesians 2:8-9 _____

II Timothy 1:9 _____

Titus 3:5 _____

Based on these verses, can a person justify or save him or herself? Why? _____

Read Colossians 1:19-22 and answer these questions. In verse 21, how does Paul describe someone before the person comes to Christ?

Read verse 22. How does Paul describe that same person after Christ finishes His work in him?

What motivates God to do such an amazing work? See verse 19.

What does God do in verse 20 in order to qualify us for this great transformation?

Romans 5:8-9 builds on the truth of Colossians 1:20. What does Paul teach in this passage?

In Romans 6:23 how does Paul describe eternal life, another phrase for a right relationship with God?

This comparison fits perfectly since we do not earn gifts. If we perfectly keep the Law of God, then we earn and deserve a right relationship with God. Yet we have seen that we haven't kept the Law. We really have earned and deserve the wrath of God's judgment. Yet God in His love allowed Christ to suffer our consequences thus showing us mercy (Titus 3:5) by not giving us what we deserve (death) and also shows us grace (II Timothy 1:9) by giving us a gift (life) that we didn't earn and don't deserve.

Just because someone offers us a free gift doesn't make it ours. We must first accept it. How then can we receive this free gift of a right relationship with God? Read Romans 5:1 for the answer.

In Romans 5:1 Paul summarizes in one word the key to a right relationship with God: faith. But faith in what, or rather in whom? Read Philippians 3:9 and reread Galatians 2:16 to answer this question.

But what does it mean to have faith in Christ? First, let's look at what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean that we have a head-knowledge of Christ, but in our hearts hope that God will consider the good we have done in life will outweigh the bad and, therefore, consider us worthy to enter into His presence. Unfortunately, many church-goers have bought into this false hope. Genuine faith in Christ means that we trust Him and Him alone to make us right with God. It means we have come to a point in our lives where we chose to stop trying to earn our way into heaven and decide to receive God's free gift by accepting Christ as our Lord and Savior.

Read I Corinthians 15:1-5 and summarize Paul's description of how the Christians in the city of Corinth become right with God on his second missionary journey.

From the above passages of Scripture we can better appreciate the importance of faith. Because our relationship with God rests on the genuineness of our faith, Paul writes in II Corinthians 13:5, “Test yourselves to see if you are in the faith; examine yourselves! Or do you not recognize this about yourselves, that Jesus Christ is in you – unless indeed you fail the test?” Do you pass the test? How do you know? Take a few minutes and write the story of when you trusted Christ to make you right with God. Use the same outline that we used to trace Paul’s spiritual journey. Describe your life before you trusted Christ, the events surrounding the time you crossed over into a right relationship with God, and lastly how He has changed your life. (If you don’t remember a lot of details, that’s okay. Just put down as much as you can.)

Before meeting Christ: _____

While meeting Christ: _____

After meeting Christ: _____

Let’s add to our spiritual growth chart. From the Apostle Paul we learn the most foundational step of all that we must take in order to grow in Christ-likeness. The first and most important step for spiritual growth involves trusting Christ and Christ alone, not our good works or religious life-styles, to make us right with God. As Habakkuk 2:4 says, “Behold, as for the proud one, his soul is not right within him; but the righteous will live by his faith.”

EIGHT STEPS TO GROW SPIRITUALLY
1. Spend time every day worshiping Jesus Christ.
2. Submit every day to the lordship of Christ.
3. Talk to God every day about Himself, others and yourself.
4. Rest every day in the assurance of your relationship with God.
5. Focus joyfully on Christ in the midst of suffering for righteousness
6. Trust Christ and Christ alone to make you right with God

Paul vigilantly guarded the Good News that by God’s grace we can receive a right relationship with God through faith in Christ and Christ alone. Anyone who tried to add anything to the message of faith in Christ and Christ alone met with uncompromising resistance.

A LITTLE EXTRA

Throughout his ministry, the Apostle Paul vigorously fought a two-front war against enemies who attacked the biblical message of the salvation through faith in Christ. Both the Judaizers and the Gnostics attempted to add something to the Gospel. Knowing a little more about both of these groups will help us better understand the context of some of Paul’s epistles.

TWO ENEMIES OF THE GOSPEL	
Judaizers	Tried to add Law to the Gospel
Gnostics	Tried to add secret knowledge to the Gospel

As we have seen earlier, the Judaizers believed that only a Jew could enter into a right relationship with God. This meant that a Gentile had to first convert to Judaism before placing his faith in the Messiah for the forgiveness of his disobedience. Converting to Judaism meant the person had to keep the Mosaic Law which affected all aspects of life including diet, the observance of special days of worship like the seven feasts depicted in Leviticus 23, and the practice of certain rituals like circumcision. Genesis 17:4 stressed the importance of circumcision by saying, “But an uncircumcised male ...shall be cut off from his people” The practice of circumcision so distinguished the Jews, that Paul often referred to the Judaizers as “those of the circumcision” or “the party of the circumcision.”

Though the apostles and elders officially settled the issue at the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15, the Judaizers continued to follow Paul as he journeyed across Asia Minor and into Europe, spreading along the way their false beliefs among the Gentile Christians. In his letter to the Galatians, Paul spends much of his time refuting the teaching of the Judaizers as he emphasizes salvation by faith as opposed to works. Galatians 2:16 clearly states the biblical position, “Nevertheless knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the Law but through faith in Christ Jesus, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, that we may be justified by faith in Christ and not by the works of the Law; since by the works of the Laws shall no flesh be justified.” Remember, justified means made relationally right with God.

In summary, Judaizers advocated Christ plus the Law.

JUDAIZERS	
CHARACTERISTICS	SCRIPTURE
Advocated circumcision as necessary for salvation	Acts 15:1, Galatians 5:6
Directed observance of the Law of Moses	Acts 15:5, Galatians 2:21

Gnostics on the other hand formed a group which wrestled with the question of why evil existed if a holy God created the universe. Rather than accept the biblical teaching that evil entered the world as a result of Adam and Eve sinfully exercising their free will, Gnostics concluded that an uncreated, holy God created another power which wasn't as perfect or holy as the highest being. This power in turn created another power, again not as perfect or holy as itself. According to Gnostic teaching, this cycle of one power creating another power of greater imperfection continued until the evil "God of the Old Testament" created a wicked universe in order to trap human souls in evil bodies.

Gnostics divided into two different sects as how one should live, based on their belief that evil resided in all physical matter. One sect proposed a life of asceticism. They taught that by denying all pleasure, including marriage, one's soul might escape its bondage to evil. The other sect argued quite the opposite. They believed that since one could not avoid contact with evil matter, then one should simply live a life of unbridled pleasure.

For the Gnostics, possessing a secret knowledge made salvation from this evil world possible. The Greek word for knowledge, *gnosis*, forms the basis of the movement's name. Only the select few who understood these mysteries about "God" attained to spiritual maturity. One of their secrets taught that holy God could not come in contact with evil matter. This teaching led to a belief that the "divine" Christ associated Himself with the "human" Jesus at his baptism, but departed at his crucifixion. This teaching meant that the Lord Jesus did not bodily rise from the dead.

Though Gnosticism as a fully formed religious movement did not come into existence until the second century A.D., Paul felt compelled to battle the early roots of this heresy in his epistle to the Colossians. He warned them in Colossians 2:8, "See to it that no one takes you captive through philosophy and empty deception, according to the tradition of men, according to the elementary principles of the world, rather than according to Christ." He desired for the Colossians to attain "to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of *understanding*, resulting in a true *knowledge* of God's *mystery*, that is, Christ Himself, in whom are hidden all the treasures of *wisdom* and *knowledge*." (Colossians 2:2-3, emphasis added.) Paul described the ultimate mystery in Colossians 1:27, "to whom God willed to make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." What bit of knowledge can top that?!

So the Gnostic teaching of Christ plus secret knowledge stands in sharp contrast to Paul's teaching in Colossians.

GNOSTICS	
GNOSTIC TEACHING	SCRIPTURAL TEACHING
An evil god created the world	Colossians 1:15-16
A series of powers created this evil god	Colossians 1:17-18
Secret knowledge leads to salvation	Colossians 2:2-3
Jesus possessed only a human nature	Colossians 2:9

We must remain thankful that Paul saw the importance of protecting the purity of the message of Christ and handed down to us through the millennia that the truth of salvation comes by faith in Christ, and Christ alone.

New Testament #7

CHURCH'S TRIALS PERIOD

We have looked in the previous chapters at the four gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and the two pillars of the Church (Peter and Paul). We now come to two half-brothers of Jesus, James and Jude, as we continue learning about the eight contributors to the New Testament. The two half-brothers both write epistles that God providentially places in the Bible. Let's consider James here and Jude in the next chapter.

What can we learn *about* James the half brother of Jesus? Scripture devotes several verses to James as well as several verses to the half-brothers of Jesus as a group. From these two groups of references we learn the following about James, making certain, however, that we do not confuse this James with the other men named James in the Bible like James the brother of John or James the son of Alphaeus or James the father of Judas (not Iscariot).

Matthew 13:55, Mark 6:3 and Jude 1:1 identify the names of Jesus' half-brothers: James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (who later calls himself Jude). Another verse (I Corinthians 9:5) implies that James may have had a wife. John 7:3-5 and Acts 1:14 indicate that the Lord's half-brothers did not believe in Jesus as the Messiah until after the resurrection. Yet later when James writes his epistle, he describes himself as a bond-servant of the Lord Jesus Christ (James 1:1). This change of heart could have occurred in between Jesus' resurrection and ascension when the risen Lord appears to James (I Corinthians 15:7) thus qualifying him to serve as an apostle (Galatians 1:19).

THE WRITINGS OF JAMES
James

In Acts 1:14 we find James in the upper room waiting on the promise of the Holy Spirit. By Acts 12:17 James has become the primary leader of the church in Jerusalem and everyone recognizes him as such (Acts 15:13-20, Galatians 2:9,12, Acts 21:18).

This rest of what we know about James comes from tradition. Both Josephus, the non-Christian historian from the first century, and Eusebius, quoting a second century Christian historian, write about Jewish priests in Jerusalem martyring James. The later source perhaps embellishes the account suggesting that the priests first push James off the pinnacle of the temple. When the fall does not kill him, the crowd begins to stone James, finishing him off by hitting him with a club. Most historians believe the martyrdom of James occurs around A.D. 61 or 62, just a few years before the martyrdom of Peter and Paul.

Let's transition now to what we can learn *from* James. Whereas Paul focuses on faith, James focuses on works, so much so that his emphasis has confused many devoted

Christians. For example, note the underlined phrases that follow. Paul wrote in Romans 3:28, “For we maintain that a man is justified by faith apart from works of the Law.” Yet in James 2:24 the Lord’s half-brother writes, “You see that a man is justified by works, and not by faith alone.” How do we reconcile these two authors of inerrant Scripture?

We must consider the main point each author desires to make. Paul, in his vigilance against the Judaizers adding anything to the gospel, declares that man receives a right relationship with God through faith and faith alone in the Lord Jesus Christ. Paul focuses on how non-Christians appropriate righteousness. James, on the other hand, focuses on how Christians demonstrate righteousness. James declares that if a person truly has a received a right relationship with God, then he or she will diligently seek to live a life that honors God. Paul deals with the reason (faith in Christ and Christ alone) for our salvation; and James deals with the result (good works) of our salvation.

PAUL	Justified by faith	Appropriation of righteousness	Reason for salvation
JAMES	Justified by works	Demonstration of righteousness	Result of salvation

In today’s culture, we need reminding of both. Many contemporary church-going people mistakenly think that their good works and moral lifestyles will get them to heaven. Paul unequivocally proclaims in Ephesians 2:8-9, “For by grace you have been saved through faith; and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God; not as a result of works, that no man should boast.” Still other church people do not live lives worthy of the Lord Jesus Christ, yet falsely believe that because they prayed a prayer asking God to forgive them of their disobedience that they have received eternal life. James calls for great caution in this regard saying, “But prove yourselves doers of the word, and not merely hearers who delude themselves.” He refutes what today we call “easy-believism.” He clearly states in James 2:19-20 that, “... the demons in hell also believe, and shudder. But are you willing to recognize, you foolish fellow, that faith without works is useless?”

So Paul and James do not disagree with each other. Their statements about justification (a right relationship with God) simply stress different aspects of the subject. One writer majors on how to appropriate righteousness and the other majors on how to demonstrate righteousness. Not only do they not disagree with each other, we can look at other verses and discover that each author actually supports the emphasis of the other.

James agrees with Paul that works do not make us right with God when he writes in James 1:18 and 21, “In the exercise of His will He brought us forth by the word of truth, so that we might be, as it were, the first fruits among His creatures.... In humility receive the word implanted, which is able to save your souls.” Paul also agrees with James that works provide the evidence of genuine salvation when he pens Ephesians 2:10, “For we

are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.”

	REASON FOR SALVATION	RESULT OF SALVATION
PAUL	The gift of God (Ephesians 2:8-9)	Works (Ephesians 2:10)
JAMES	The exercise of His will (James 1:21)	Works (James 2:17)

Let’s look at chapters 3-4 in the book of James and consider some of the “good” works others should see in our lives as we follow the Lord Jesus Christ.

Read James 3:2-12. On what area of a Christian’s life do these verses dwell?

List the various illustrations James uses in these verses to describe his main topic.

How can you better demonstrate your love for the Lord Jesus in this important area of your life?

In chapter 3 verses 13-18 James moves to another category of good works. In this paragraph he writes about wisdom. What does he say earthly wisdom looks like?

Does it surprise you that he calls earthly wisdom “demonic” in verse 15? Why?

How does James describe wisdom from above?

What can you apply to your own life from these verses? Please be as specific as possible.

In the fourth chapter verses 1-10, James hammers our worldly lusts. What springs from these selfish desires?

When we nurture these worldly desires, James equates us with adulteresses, and enemies of God. How can he make such powerful comments? Refer to verses 4-5.

James provides a remedy for our selfish desires in verses 6-10. What does he propose? How can you implement this solution in your own life?

Move now to James 4:13-18. Verse 13 highlights the answers to five questions. Write the answers below.

Who?

When?

Where?

What?

Why?

The person James describes in verse 13 seems to have considered everything except God! A righteous person centers his or her life completely around God. People often misinterpret verse 15. They think that when we tell others our future plans we should say something like, "Lord willing." This paragraph communicates much more than just reciting the phrase as some superstitious cliché. James poignantly calls for us to seek the will of God in everything we do. A vast difference exists between seeking to include God in our plan for our life, and seeking to include ourselves in God's plan for our life. How would you explain this difference?

Never forget, life is not about us, but all about Him. What can you do differently as a result of James 4:13-17?

If we have truly received a right relationship with God through faith in the Lord Jesus, then our lives should show it by our good works. The more we grow in our walk with Christ the more obvious these good works will appear to others around us. Many non-Christians today avoid church because they do not see us Christians living like we should. As we take the words of James to heart, people searching for God's love and forgiveness will know where to look and will find the Answer to their heart's desire.

To practice good works means, as James puts it in verse 22 of chapter one, becoming doers of the word. Let's add this step to our spiritual growth chart.

EIGHT STEPS TO GROW SPIRITUALLY
1. Spend time every day worshipping Jesus Christ.
2. Submit every day to the lordship of Christ.
3. Talk to God every day about Himself, others and yourself.
4. Rest every day in the assurance of your relationship with God.
5. Focus joyfully on Christ in the midst of suffering for righteousness
6. Trust in Christ and Christ alone to make you right with God
7. Become a doer of the word by practicing good works

Micah 6:8 says, "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" Or as Jesus puts it in Matthew 5:16, "Let your light shine before men in such a way that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in heaven."

A LITTLE EXTRA

In light of the persecution that occurs during the Trials Period of the Church, a better understanding of the various forms of execution helps us better appreciate both the culture of those times as well as the price paid by the heroes of our Christian faith. Three main forms of execution exist at this point in biblical history.

The Jews chose stoning as their primary form of execution though they used other forms of execution such as the sword and burning. The Jewish people employed the sword upon murderers (Numbers 35:16-21) and idolaters (Deuteronomy 13:15). Perhaps Herod Agrippa accused James, the brother of John, of blasphemy in order to justify having him put to death by the sword. The Old Testament also allowed for burning of individuals (Leviticus 20:14) who committed certain heinous crimes. They practiced stoning, however, more often than not. At least nine different crimes merited stoning: for an ox killing another person after being warned of its danger (Exodus 21:28-29), sacrificing children to other gods (Leviticus 20:2), divination (Leviticus 20:27), blasphemy (Leviticus 24:14-16), breaking the Sabbath (Numbers 15:32-36), enticing others to worship other gods (Deuteronomy 13:6-10), worshiping other gods (Deuteronomy 17:2-5), rebelling against a parent (Deuteronomy 21:18-21), and adultery (Deuteronomy 22:21-24).

Before a stoning could occur, at least two witnesses had to validate the crime as well as cast the first stones (Deuteronomy 17:6). If their initial stones did not kill the condemned person, then spectators joined in throwing stones until the criminal died (Deuteronomy 13:9). Stephen's death in Acts 7 illustrates this form of execution.

The Romans practiced two types of execution during this time period. For non-Roman citizens, the court system used crucifixion. For their own citizens, they practiced beheadings. We have already learned a little about crucifixions, but a short review will remind us of what the apostle Peter endured at his martyrdom. Don't forget that he requested that the Romans crucify him upside down.

Though some differences existed throughout the Roman Empire regarding the implementation of a crucifixion, the execution typically followed a certain procedure. After the judge issued a guilty verdict, a soldier first scourged the condemned using a whip of leather thongs perhaps weighted with pieces of bone or metal. The weakened criminal then carried the patibulum or horizontal section of the cross to the place of death. In front of the procession walked a soldier holding a sign naming the condemned's crime. Once outside the city, soldiers nailed or tied the criminal's arms to the patibulum then attached it to the upright post which remained permanently planted in the ground. Death occurred slowly after the transgressor suffered incredible pain and agony.

THREE TYPES OF EXECUTIONS		
For Jews	Stoning	Stephen
For Roman non-citizens	Crucifixion	Peter
For Roman citizens	Beheading	Paul

The Empire did not crucify Roman citizens found guilty of crimes deserving death. The government considered this form of punishment too ignoble, choosing instead to behead its own people thus sparing them the humiliation and suffering. Because Paul possessed Roman citizenship, the judicial system provided for him a relatively quick and painless death. The execution probably involved a sword and not an ax.

New Testament #8

CHURCH'S TRIUMPHANT PERIOD

To the four gospel writers (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) and the two pillars of the Church (Peter and Paul), we now add the second of Jesus' half-brothers. Having discussed James, the first half-brother, in the previous chapter, we now devote our attention to Jude.

Few people know much about this biblical author because the New Testament rarely mentions him. From Matthew 13:55 and Mark 6:3 we see Jude as one of four half-brothers of Jesus, probably younger than his brother James because of the order of their names. Referred to as Judas in the original language of the Bible, later English translators referred to him as Jude. Perhaps they used the abbreviated version of his name so others would not confuse him with Judas Iscariot.

We also know from John 7:3-5 that Jude did not esteem his half-brother as the Messiah at first. Only after the resurrection (Acts 1:14, Jude 1) do we find Jude or any of the half-brothers of Jesus following Him as their Lord and Savior. One other scriptural reference might give some insight into the life of Jude. According to I Corinthians 9:5, Jude may have had a wife who accompanied him during his ministry.

Both James and Jude wrote only one book of Bible. Each book bears the name of the respective author. The book of Jude contains one unique characteristic from the other New Testament books in that it uses a quotation from Jewish literature when it quotes from the book of Enoch in verses fourteen and fifteen.

THE WRITINGS OF JUDE
Jude

Like the second epistle of Peter, Jude's epistle focuses on false teachers. Though the book of Jude consists of only 25 verses, it has much to say about our walk with God today. So what can we learn from Jude and his brief address on false teachers? To answer this question, let's first gain a quick overview of his writing.

In the first two verses of his letter, Jude introduces himself and pens a prayer for his readers. In the next two verses he expresses the purpose of his epistle noting that certain persons have crept into the Church unnoticed. These ungodly people not only teach that it is acceptable to sin, but they also deny Jesus as Master and Lord. Concerned about these ungodly people, Jude exhorts his readers to "contend earnestly for the faith."

Jude devotes the bulk of the epistle, verses 5-16, to describing false teachers. In verses 5-7 he shows how God judged people in the past that turned away from the truth: the Hebrews in the wilderness, the angels who left heaven, as well as the people living in

Sodom and Gomorrah. Then in verses 8-16 he switches to present tense and describes the characteristics of “these men.” Jude portrays them as defiling the flesh, rejecting authority, reviling angelic majesties, reviling the things which they do not understand, grumblers, finding fault, following after their own lusts, speaking arrogantly, and flattering people for the sake of gaining an advantage.

Verses 17-23 provide practical steps on how to “contend earnestly for the faith.” He implores that his readers remember that the apostles warned that mockers would arise, build themselves up in their faith, pray, keep themselves in the love of God, wait anxiously for the mercy of Christ to eternal life, and help others avoid going astray.

Finally, in the last two verses of his book, Jude closes his letter with a beautiful benediction.

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK OF JUDE	
PASSAGE	TOPIC
Verses 1-2	Salutation
Verses 3-4	Concern about false teachers
Verses 5-16	Characteristics of false teachers
Verses 17-23	Cure for false teachers
Verses 24-25	Benediction

Let’s return to our earlier question, “What can we learn from Jude to help us grow spiritually?” Like Jude we live in a time where false teaching invades the Church. As such, we also must “contend earnestly for the faith.” The original word in the Greek, translated in our Bibles as “contend earnestly,” comes from the realm of war and athletic competition and implies giving strenuous effort in order to win. The word faith stands for the truth we received from Christ. In other words, Jude exhorts us to do everything we can in order not to lose the teachings that the Lord Jesus has given us.

So today how do we practically “contend earnestly for the faith?” Let’s review the practical steps Jude provides in verses 17-23.

Jude begins with the exhortation to remember that mockers, following after their own ungodly lusts, will come (Jude 17-18). It seems wise to start with this initial step lest false teaching unknowingly influences us. In what ways have mockers infiltrated false teaching into the Church today?

Jude’s second step calls for us to build ourselves up in the faith (Jude 20). Today we might put it like this: the best defense is a good offense. To protect against false teachers

tearing down our faith, we must focus on building up our faith. Growing in our understanding of Scripture accomplishes this step better than any other means. After you complete this Bible study book, what steps will you take to increase your understanding and obedience of God's Word:

Jude next calls for us to pray in the Spirit (Jude 20) in order to contend earnestly for the faith. We discussed prayer both in the Private Period of Christ and in the Trials Period of Christ so we will not repeat ourselves here. Yet we must ask one important question about prayer. Have you proven consistent in your daily prayer time? If not, what can you do to increase your consistency?

The fourth practical suggestion involves keeping ourselves in the love of God (Jude 21). This step may seem quite harmless until we realize the power behind this verse. Jesus said in John 15:9-10, "Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide in My love. If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments, and abide in His love." To remain in the love of God we must obey what Scripture tells us. We fall short if we focus simply on mastering the Word of God. We must diligently seek to let the Word of God master us. That only happens as we obey what we learn. Have you learned anything from Scripture during this study that you know you need to obey but you have not yet done so? If so, what will you do to obey God's Word and as a result keep yourself in the love of God?

Jude's fifth step calls for us to wait anxiously for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ to eternal life (Jude 21). Paul writes the same thought when he says, "Looking for the blessed hope and the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Christ Jesus. (Titus 2:13)" From our study on the seven prophecies which summarize the Triumphant Period of the Church, we know that Jude 21 points to the coming of Christ for the Church. Looking expectantly for the return of Christ motivates us to live holy lives and not fall away from God's Word. John elaborates on this concept when he writes, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure. (I John 3:2-3)" What can you do to look more expectantly for the return of Christ?

The last practical step of Jude that will help us to contend earnestly for the faith, urges us to help others avoid going astray from the truth of God’s Word (Jude 22-23). Who do you know that may currently struggle with doubts regarding the Christian faith? What can you do to help them stay true to the faith?

We have discussed a lot about what contending earnestly for the faith means and how to practically go about it, but we have not stressed why we would even want to do so. We find the answer to that question in Jude’s benediction in the last two verses of his epistle. He writes, “Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy, to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.” We should want to contend earnestly for the faith because of all that God has done (forgives us of our disobedience and gives us a right relationship with Himself) and will do for us (makes us stand in the presence of His glory blameless). Truly He deserves all glory, majesty, dominion and authority. He deserves our very best.

Let’s add one last step to our spiritual growth chart.

EIGHT STEPS TO GROW SPIRITUALLY
1. Spend time every day worshiping Jesus Christ.
2. Submit every day to the lordship of Christ.
3. Talk to God every day about Himself, others and yourself.
4. Rest every day in the assurance of your relationship with God.
5. Focus joyfully on Christ in the midst of suffering for righteousness
6. Trust in Christ and Christ alone to make you right with God
7. Become a doer of the word by practicing good works
8. Contend earnestly for the faith

A LITTLE EXTRA

Many mistakenly think that crossing over into a right relationship with God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ marks the end of a spiritual journey. In one sense they stand correct. Yet, in another more important sense they have really just begun their journey. Scripture speaks of three phases of salvation: past, present and future.

In Romans 5:1 Scripture calls the first phase of salvation “justification.” “Therefore having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.” Justification before God happens the very instant we place our faith in Christ. At that moment God both forgives us of the penalty of our sin as well as declares us righteous. In

other words, He not only forgives all of our disobedient attitudes and actions, but also adds to our account the perfect obedience of Christ. (See II Corinthians 5:21.)

God’s Word calls the second phase of salvation “sanctification” in Romans 6:22. “But now having been freed from sin and enslaved to God, you derive your benefit, resulting in sanctification, and the outcome, eternal life.” In I Thessalonians 4:3-7 Paul uses the term three times in the space of five verses. Sanctification lasts from the moment you receive Christ until your death or rapture. It involves the process of God saving you from sin’s power as day by day you become more and more conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.

THREE PHASES OF SALVATION			
TERM	Justification	Sanctification	Glorification
TIME	Past	Present	Future
FOCUS	Was saved from the penalty of sin	Being saved from the power of sin	Will be saved from the presence of sin
OCCURANCE	Point in time	Process	Point in time
SCRIPTURE (John, Peter, Paul)	I John 3:5 II Peter 3:9 Titus 2:11	I John 3:3 II Peter 3:18 Titus 2:12	I John 3:2 II Peter 3:13 Titus 2:13

The third phase of salvation carries the name “glorification” based on verses like Romans 8:18, “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” Colossians 3:4 adds, “When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory.” Glorification occurs the moment you see Jesus at either your death or rapture. At that point in time God will save you from the presence of sin itself and complete His work of changing you into the image of Christ.

John summarizes this grand affair in I John 3:1-3, “See how great a love the Father has bestowed upon us, that we should be called children of God; and such we are. For this reason the world does not know us, because it did not know Him. Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is. And everyone who has this hope fixed on Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.”

What a remarkable journey God has called us to travel! May we allow the Word of God to master us as we focus intently on the hope of God changing us one day into the image of His Son, Jesus Christ.