

# GOING TOWARD GOD



## **Growing Spiritual Marriages**

**2019**

# **FAMILY PRAYER**

May each family be protected from harm, danger, misfortune and sadness.

May we enjoy the privilege of spending time together; sharing joy, celebrating happy occasions and being there for each other when comfort is needed.

May good health come our way, and may there be ever-present faith in God, His mercy and grace.

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## INTRODUCTION

Maintaining a spiritual life is filled with difficulties, problems, trials and temptations. Our journey of “going toward God” is a rough road because of the obstacles Satan places in our way. The greater our determination to preserve and overcome his hinderances, the stronger we become. There is an old saying, “if it doesn’t kill you, it makes you stronger” (unknown). We have the examples of Job and Peter as they made the journey of “*going toward God.*”

This journey will take us through unknown and desolate country we are blessed to have God as our guide. As the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, they were guided by the very presence of God; a pillar of cloud by day and a pillar of fire by night. Today God provides His children the same type of guidance through His word. “For God, who said, ‘Let light shine out of darkness,’ made His light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ’ (II Corinthians 4:6 - NIV). It was God the creator who said, “Let there be light” and it was so, this same God has chosen His inspired word to guide His children today. Consider: God first gave us language so He could communicate and then He gave us understanding so we could follow His guidance He provided through the “light of knowledge.”

At least part of making a successful journey “*going toward God*” is moving from student to teacher. Hebrews 5: 11–14 illustrates this point very well. It is imperative that the cycle of learning and teaching continue. Consider II Timothy 2:2 and Titus 2:3. The progression from milk to meat can only be accomplished by continuous study and application of God’s word **ON** our lives. This part of God’s plan for reaching long-term spiritual maturity is detrimental to the Lords’ work. He never intended for His children to be milk-drinkers only.

When a man and woman who are devoted to the Lord are joined in marriage, they become a formidable force in overcoming Satan’s obstacles on the road “*going toward God.*” It is my hope and prayer that this material will assist you in growing spiritual a marriage.

Louis Cook

## **Tribute**

We are all shaped and refined by our failures and successes. As a husband, parent, preacher of the gospel and an elder in the Lord's church I have experienced both. A great many people have influenced, shaped and improved me though the years but not a single person has impacted my life more than my wonderful wife of 56 years. She has been my greatest critic, supporter and helpmeet throughout our marriage. The love of my life has supported me as we traveled from place to place to preach; some difficult, others very rewarding. Regardless, Pat never wavered in love, care and support for me. Without her support, encouragement and determination to serve the Lord, my service to Him would have been greatly hindered.

A THANK YOU is not nearly enough.

Louis Cook

2019

Editor's note – The lessons were written from my understanding of God's word and my personal experiences. Lesson 11: Loss of a Spouse is the one exception, for which I am very grateful to God. This chapter was written from reading other people's experiences.



# 1 ONENESS

God said, “It is not good that man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18). As is the nature of God, He included in the same verse a solution, “I will make a helper suitable for him.” God cured Adam’s **aloneness** by providing him the first woman, who became his wife; “the two became ONE flesh” (Genesis 2:24).

God’s design of **oneness** grows from *a mutual, intelligent, and unreserved commitment to be an instrument of God to deeply touch a spouse’s personal needs in a unique, powerful and meaningful way.* (Larry Crabb)

**Oneness is a mutual commitment  
to provide for one another’s personal needs.**

When God commanded, “husbands love your wives,” there were no *BUTS* in the statement and the same is true when wives are commanded by God to submit to their husbands. **The BUTS arise when the ONENESS GOAL is missing.** We must constantly remind ourselves of the highest purpose as a spouse, to be an instrument for promoting our partner’s spiritual and personal welfare. To attain a marriage that is based on God’s commands we must understand that the ONENESS goal is not an option to be considered but rather a command from God, (Ephesians 5:21). It must be applied to married life, whether you have been married 5 years, 50 or more.

One of the greatest failures in this world is communication. If either spouse loses focus of the ONENESS GOAL, communication becomes a major problem. Communication, the exchange of information between a sender and receiver. The exchange of information can be interrupt by various factors such as manipulation, selfishness, disinterest, or misunderstandings. All which lead to a deterioration of the ONENESS GOAL. However, a well-nourished faith will carry the couple past this difficult period, avoiding disaster. If a couple has not reached this level of spiritual maturity there can be frustration, hurt, negative feelings and fears of the outcomes. Negative feelings can be a major obstacle to developing and maintaining effective communication and can occur at the most inopportune time.

***Oneness is the emotional, spiritual, and sexual intimacy of marriage.***

? What strategy can we develop for handling negative emotions that keeps the “ONENESS GOAL” in place and doesn’t create other relationship problems?

How do we deal with both sinful feelings such as lust or greed and non-sinful feelings such as sorrow, grief, regret? ANSWER--**acknowledge all of these before the Lord with a humble attitude of contriteness and repentance, trusting the Lord to forgive. Trust in Him to lead us in His way.**

In Ezekiel 24 God instructed Ezekiel, at the loss of his wife, to keep his emotions private (to himself, acknowledge inwardly) in order to allow God to use him for a greater purpose and to His benefit. His idea of controlling our emotions can often prevent spoken words that will be regretted. “Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a **word as is good for later edification** according to the **need of the moment**, so that it will give grace to those who hear” (Ephesians 4:29 - NAS95). When speech is regulated, according to Paul’s instruction, many hurtful or embarrassing words can be avoided. Please *meditate* on this verse, use it the next time there is confusion or misunderstanding with your spouse.

Any time there is poor communication, the outcome can be manifested in the physical relationship. Not only in the sexual realm but in a lack of physical contact. There is great power in the act of physically touching your spouse, not just sexually but just being warm, reassuring, and attentive to the spouse’s needs. Listening while holding hands accentuates the communication between spouses. Think: you can’t be holding a screen while holding hands. Listening is more effective when one is not distracted. To many people the scariest words are, “we need to talk.” This fear probably means that regular, meaningful communication is not practiced on a regular basis. It may be a signal that you have done something wrong. The real meaning should be that your spouse has an unmet need. Surprise – they may just want to talk, share, bounce an idea, or have a sounding board. There is far greater power when spouses are meshed together.

“And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three strands is not quickly torn apart” (Ecclesiastes 4:12 – NASB). A godly marriage is comprised of 3! The writer of Ecclesiastes had a clear understanding of what it means to be connected. “Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm alone?” (Ecclesiastes 4:9-11).

There can be great rewards for marriage partners when good, effective communication occurs. However, there are many hinderances that dilute the power of good communication:

- (1) One-sided conversation - selfishness
- (2) Becoming historical - remembering past offenses
- (3) My way or else - bullying
- (4) Now ... You add to the list

Communication and trust are the main ingredients in any successful relationship. Understanding how effective communication works leads to intimacy and mutual value in the marriage relationship and results in a growing “ONENESS”.

**“Death and life are in the power of the tongue,  
and those who love it will eat its fruit.**

**Proverbs 18:21- NASB**

**?????????? QUESTIONS: LESSON 1 ????????????**

1. Why was it not good for man to be alone?
2. Explain in your own words what “oneness” means.
3. Give reasons for so many communication problems.
4. List other things that dilute the power of good communication.
5. List ways to remove hinderances to communication in marriage.
6. Why did God instruct Ezekiel to morn internally?
7. Explain Proverbs 18:21. How can this apply to your own life?
8. **REFLECTION QUESTION:** Do you completely follow Ephesians 4:29 in marital discussions? Why or why not?

# 2

# CHILDREN IN THE HOME

200 years ago, Socrates said, “I could climb to the highest place in Athens, I could lift my voice and proclaim: fellow citizens, why do you turn and scrape every stone to gather wealth and take so little care of your children to whom one day you must relinquish it all?” He was a very wise man who wrote a great meaningful statement which holds true today. More on this subject in Lesson 7.

One of the most important and precious aspects of a family things are the children. Go speaks of their importance to a happy household in Titus 2: 3-4 and 1 Timothy 3: 2-4, 3:13.

The home provides for the needs of every child such as food, clothing, shelter and other physical needs. Scientific studies have shown that over 90% of all the children born today will be “normal,” they are then shaped and molded by their emotional and cultural environment.

## THE CHILDREN’S BILL OF RIGHTS

### 1. **Right to be loved** (I John 4: 17-21)

A sense of being wanted relieves the feelings of insecurity and lack of value. A home that is chaotic, with fussing and fighting, produces children with serious antisocial attitudes – **not** Christ-like. Love must be demonstrated.

“Little children let us not love with word or with tongue, but in **deed** and **truth**” I (John 3:18).

“Whatever you do in **word or deed**, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father” (Colossian 3:17 – NAS95).

### 2. **Right to be treated impartiality**

Halfway between partial and indifference is the place we find God as and His example of how He treats His children. We should follow His example in the way we treat our own children. No respecter of persons, “And masters, do the same things to

them, and give up threatening knowing that both their Master and yours is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him” (Ephesians 6:9 – NAS95). Also consider Colossians 3:25. The stories of Jacob and Esau as well as Joseph and his brothers are classic examples of the results of partial treatment by parents. Many lives have been severely damaged, and some destroyed, when parents failed to follow God’s way.

### 3. **Right to be disciplined**

The world today has almost totally failed to gain an understanding of God’s instruction about discipline. The “rod of discipline” that is referred to in Proverbs 10:13, 13:24 and other passages has been misused and misunderstood as the purpose of discipline. Begin in the first chapter of Proverbs and notice that the beginning of discipline is **INSTRUCTIVE**: teaching and admonishing our children in the way of the Lord. “To know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive instruction in wise behavior righteousness, justice and equity; to give prudence to the naïve, to the youth knowledge and the discretion, a wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel” (Proverbs 1: 2-5 – NAS95).

We can also see the results of good and proper teaching in 1 Timothy 3:14, “You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have **learned them** and that from childhood you have **known** the sacred writings which are able to **give you the wisdom** that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (NAS95).

### 4. **Right to a Spiritual Education**

The home must be an educational institution for the building of character, a place of togetherness and the training of children to be worthy members in God’s service (1 Samuel 13:8). Spiritual education is established by precept, example and loyalty; the root of all virtues. Loyalty and love are the sound basis for life pleasing to God and satisfactory for mankind.

### 5. **Right to spiritual nourishment**

“I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able” (1 Corinthians 3:2 – NAS95). “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation” (1 Peter 2:2). Just as Paul and Peter instruct to begin with milk and introduce solid food as we grow, this is how we must nourish our children. Add stronger solid foods to help them develop their own faith. The growth will become evident if you follow Paul’s instruction, “Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you” 1 Timothy 4:16 – NAS95.

6. **Right to Christian Examples**

Children are mirrors, reflecting the very image of their parents. Dad and Mom must daily demonstrate that Christ is the center of their home. Take the time, the trouble and energy to develop a full understanding that Christ must be pre-eminent in your hearts (2 Timothy 1:5).

7. **Right to Grow**

Anything we try to grow, vegetables, flowers or crops, depends on proper conditions: good soil, proper nutrients, water, and cultivated. Providing these conditions for our growing children are much the same. They should have the right to grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). The good soil is created by proper examples, spiritual nourishment, watered by love and cultivated by instructive and corrective disciplines.

8. **Right to go to Heaven**

Following God’s plan for the home and family will lead children to grow up, mature and seek after spiritual things. Assist them to focus on making God the center of their lives, using every opportunity to allow the glory of God to shine “out” to others.

Note to Parents:

- ★ Children are the only things you can take to Heaven.
- ★ It is much easier to buildup a child than to repair an adult.
- ★ Listen earnestly to anything your child wants to tell you, regardless of what it is. If you don’t listen eagerly to the little thigs when they are small, they won’t tell you the bigger things when they grow older because to them **all** of it has always been big.

**?????????? QUESTIONS: LESSON 2 ????????????**

1. Explain the meaning of this quote by Socrates, “I could climb to the highest place in Athens, I could lift my voice and proclaim: fellow citizens, why do you turn and scrape every stone to gather wealth and take so little care of your children to whom one day you must relinquish it all?”
2. List three things God said about the importance of children.
3. What is meant by “The Children’s Bill of Rights?”
4. Of the eight Bill of Rights given, which three are the most important? Explain why.
5. At what point in life does a parent complete the teaching stage for his children?

In the normal course of life parents precede their children in death. The question under consideration is: *what will you leave in your estate? What things of value will be listed?*

1. **Personal Example**

“In all things show yourself to be an example of good deeds, with purity in doctrine, dignified” (Titus 2:7 - NAS95). Our children have a right to expect us to set a proper example for them. Look at the verse - *show yourself* by good deeds, purity, sensible, and dignified. “Brethren join in following my example and observe those who walk according to the pattern you have in us” (Philippians 3:17). We must remember that children are a mirror of the examples they see in their parents, Bible class teachers and others, weather good or bad examples.

2. **A Good Name**

“A **good name** is to be more desired than great wealth, Favor is better than silver and gold” (Proverbs 22:1 - NAS95). Consider the content of this verse - contrast great wealth vs. good name and see the huge value of a good name and what that means. “A **good name** is better than a good ointment, And the day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth” (Ecclesiastes 7:1 - NAS95). A soiled or tainted name is a heavy burden for children to bear. Often it is a barrier to potential opportunities and must be “lived down,” or overcome, to allow doors of opportunity to be accessible.

3. **Principled Life**

Principles are the precepts of honor and effectiveness in human conduct. As we grow in wisdom, we come to **see** the value of living a principled life based on the holy scriptures. Our faithfulness is dependent on the level on which we adhere to the true principles. True biblical principles are permanent, and they are dependable, stable, and trustworthy guidelines for our conduct (2 Peter 1:5-9).

4. **Memory of a Spiritual Home**

There is no greater heritage you can leave your children than a stable spiritual home. The lessons learned and lifelong memories can serve as a basis for a stable spiritual

home. This should become an anchor for the soul to help children build their own faith (Hebrews 6:19). The prodigal son reflected on the memory of his father's home and realized his error. It was that memory that helped bring him back from disaster. Whether a child is in the deepest hole or on a pinnacle of life, the blessing of a spiritual home remains of extreme importance in the success of our children (Proverbs 22:6).

#### 5. **Spiritual Education**

“And Jesus kept increasing in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52 - NAS95). This is the same path Samuel was traveling (2 Samuel 2:26) and the path we want our children to as well. When our children are spiritually educated to follow God's path, God will be pleased, and they will find favor with other spiritual people. Remember Christ was only 12 years old in Luke 2. Early childhood development is the basis for a spiritual life. “For I am mindful of the sincere faith within you, which first dwelt in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it is in you as well” (2 Timothy 1:5 - NAS95). “And that from **childhood** you have known the sacred writings which are able to give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus” (2 Timothy 3:15 - NAS95). The things learned as a child give wisdom, start early, and never stop; instruction that leads to salvation (Proverbs 4:7).

#### 6. **A Genuine Faith in God**

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen” (Hebrews 11:1 - NAS95). The scriptures list many kinds of faith: Mark 4:40 talks about having, “no faith,” James 2:17 refers to faith as shipwrecked, abandoned, and even dead. This is a faith that will not produce righteousness. Genuine faith produces obedience (John 14:15) and parents are responsible for demonstrating a “real” faith for their children, “in both word and in deeds” (Colossians 3:17). If we do not demonstrate “real” faith our words will be empty and worthless.

*I took a piece of plastic clay  
And gently fashioned it one day:  
And as my fingers pressed it still,  
It moved and wielded to my will.*

*I came again when days were pasted:  
The bit of clay was hard at last.  
The form I gave it still it bore,  
But I could change that form no more.*

*I took a piece of living clay  
And gently formed it day by day,  
And molded with my power and art  
A young child's soft and yielding heart.*

*I came again when days were gone  
It was a man I looked upon.  
He still that early impression wore,  
And I could change it never more*



### To Every Parent

There are little eyes upon you,  
And they are watching night and day;  
There are little ears that quickly take  
In every word you say;  
There are little hands all eager to do  
Everything you do,  
And a little child who's dreaming of  
The day he'll be like you.

You're the little child's idol,  
You're t the wisest of the wise,  
In his little mind about you,  
No suspicions ever rise;  
He believes in you devoutly,  
Holds all you say and do;

He will say and do in your way when  
He's grown up to be like you.  
There's a wide-eyed little child who  
Believes you're always right,  
And his ears are always open and he  
Watches day and night;  
You are setting an example  
Everyday in all you do

For the little child who's waiting  
To grow up like you.

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### **QUESTIONS: LESSON 3**

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1. Explain, in your own words, the meaning of a legacy.
2. List some soiled or tainted names.
3. How can your example affect the children of others?
4. Explain the process of helping children develop their own faith.
5. At what age should parents start a child's spiritual instruction? Explain.
6. Why are there so many different types of faith listed in the scriptures?

# 4

# UNCLUTTERING LIVES

One of the attributes of a Christian is to help others. Say yes when anyone asks for help or unselfishly offer assistance when there is a need. These are good qualities until we overextend ourselves to the point we are unable to be of real help when called upon. When our lives become cluttered and we lose control of our schedule our home life and life in general can suffer. Where is God in all of this? Everything has a cost; time, energy, money. Can you afford the cost? (Luke 14:28)

Cluttered lives are very tough to control! Life can get messy, almost overwhelming at times. There are a variety of “good deeds” that can clutter our lives: overtime, additional commitments at work, unfinished projects at home, commitments at church, sports, entertainment and you can finish the list. It is a lot like cleaning out the hall closet or the messy garage.

Sometimes we need to DECLUTTER our hearts! Our spiritual lives can get so cluttered that it is hard for others to see Jesus in us.

God expects His light to shine through us to others, “So that you will prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom **you appear as lights in the world**” (Philippians 2:15 - NAS95). It is very difficult for us to be lights in the world if we are running “to and fro” trying to be all things to all people, not really being anything to anyone. The glory of God that we want others to see in us gets lost among the bad habits and obligations we have allowed to pile up over the course of time.

“But **examine everything carefully**; hold fast to that *which is good*” (1 Thessalonians 5:21 - NAS95). This verse connects to our point. As we clean out the closet or garage this is what we do, examine an item then keep what is good and dispose of what is not.

Start the spiritual decluttering process with a checklist; prioritize the items on the list.

- (1) Relationship with Christ
- (2) Marriage
- (3) Parenting
- (4) Work
- (5) (add your own)

Your list will be different from mine because some areas may have been more chaotic than others however, Christ should always be at the top of every list. (Matthew 6:33)

Secondly, take an inventory of your activities, relationships, and commitments in every area of your life. Be especially mindful of the spiritual activities, make sure they have priority over the secular ones. "These words, which I am commanding you today, shall be on your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way and when you lie down and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand and they shall be as frontals on your forehead. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deuteronomy 6:6-9 - NAS95). Electronics are a wonderful invention however, like many other things WE must be in control of them. All too often **screens** have removed the "art of conversation" between husbands and wives. Family meals, when many discussions can take place, are infrequent. A real discussion of problems cannot be held on a **screen**.

As we strive to declutter the heart, we may find valuable things we had pushed to the back corner, away from our focus and attention.

Start the decluttering process with a penitent heart, "**Create** in me a **clean** heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Psalms 51:10 - NAS95). David was decluttering his life when he wrote these words. He had previously confessed his sins to God. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9 - NAS95). Where do we begin? Begin by removing the old habits, letting go of the past and the things that *hide* the glory of God.

1. **Pride**

"The wicked, in the haughtiness of his countenance, does not seek Him. All his thoughts are, "There is no God" (Psalms 10:4 - NAS95).

2. **Anger**

"This you know, my beloved brethren. But everyone must be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger; for the anger of man does not achieve the righteousness of God" (James 1:19-20 - NAS95).

3. **Unforgiveness**

"Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions. "But if you do not forgive, neither will your Father who is in heaven forgive your transgressions" (Mark 11:25-26 - NAS95).

4. **Idolatry**

The things that take up our time, energy and efforts are an idol. "Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry" 1 John 5:21) "Little children, guard yourselves from idols" 1 Corinthians 10:14 - NAS95).

5. **Gossip**

“A perverse man spreads strife, and a slanderer separates intimate friends” (Proverbs 16:28 - NAS95). Whisperings are among those who were condemned 1 Cor. 12:20.

6. **Addictions**

Consider Romans 6:16-20 and 1 Corinthians 9:27. "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth" (Matthew 6:24 - NAS95).

7. **Emotional issues**

Many experience fears, anxiety, worry, and doubt which consume their lives. “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God” (Philippians 4:6 - NAS95).

8. **Guilt or shame (of things in your past)**

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come” (2 Corinthians 5:17).

9. **Self-righteousness**

“For not knowing about God's righteousness and seeking to establish their own, they did not subject themselves to the righteousness of God” (Romans 10:3).

**Clean and Restock**

Once you have pulled everything out, it's time to start cleaning and replacing the clutter with the tools God has given us to make wise decisions:

A. **Read-** The Bible is God's message to us, so it's a perfect place to go for advice.

James 1:22 & 2 Timothy 2:15

B. **Apply** the scriptures to your life. After a thorough study, commit to obeying the will of God.

John 15: 9 & 2 Corinthians 10:2

C. **Pray-** Seek wisdom from God to recognize what is hindering you and the courage to overcome obstacles.

Psalms 26:2, Psalms 139:23 & Job 31:6

D. **Worship-** Worship is the only gift we can give back to God He did not first give us.

Hebrews 10: 23-25

**Results of proper decluttering** - removing clutter, clinging to what is good, adding the needed tools to use in our lives to be pleasing to God. 2 Corinthians 5:9, Hebrews 13:21, 1 John 3:22

The very worst disadvantage of the cluttered life is that being at peace and growing in our relationship with God becomes almost impossible.

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## **QUESTIONS: LESSON 4**

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1. What is clutter?

2. Explain the meaning of Philippians 2:15.

3. What does your spiritual declutter list look like?

4. Describe the effects of “screens” on your marriage and family.

5. Add to the list of things that “hide” the glory of God?

6. Give examples of other “restock” items?

In 2 Kings 20:15 God asked, "**What have they seen in your house?**" So, Hezekiah answered, 'They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them.'

Endless numbers of sermons have used this verse as a text, let us use it for the beginning of this lesson. It is sometime stated "a man's home is his castle" therefore he can do whatever he wishes! **WRONG!** Our very **best** behavior should be in our homes because the people we love and treasure the most are there. The people we need to impress with our **BEST** example see us daily. Sometimes, especially in times past, Mom and Dad would tell their children "be on your best behavior, the preacher is coming today." What does that statement tell us about that family?

Today, right now looking through the "nana cam" **What would we see in your house?**

Reflect

*A home devoted to serving God  
is our TOP priority.*

Christian parents set the examples and provide guidance of using time, talents and energy toward activities that focus on God. These should not be activities that t hinder devotion to God. It seems to me that Satan has been highly successful in using electronics to invade our homes, separate families, and poison our society. Satan has easily defeated every type of home security system by using our "smart" devises against us. He does not have to "break-in," he is in 24/7. He is in our home and our pocket; he is everywhere, and we have provided the access route. As

parents we must build a new firewall between him and our families and self. That firewall is Jesus Christ. “Make sure that your character is free from the love of money, being content with what you have; for He Himself has said, "I WILL NEVER DESERT YOU, NOR WILL I EVER FORSAKE YOU." We can confidently say, "THE LORD IS MY HELPER, I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO TO ME?" (Hebrews 13:5-6 - NAS95). With this firewall in place we can move toward providing spiritual activities in the home that will prepare our children to a life serving God.

Examine the illustration below, you can easily see the activities’ growth and development that blends normal activities of life guided by spiritual goals. These character-building activities, while using biblical principles, teaches skills that can be used in teaching and serving others.



This pattern of building blocks has its focus on the ultimate goal - Heaven, everything else is building toward that end result.

**What would we see in this house?**

1. A family seeking to put God first, Matthew 6:33. “Not anxious about things of this life” (Matthew 6: 25). A life that allows us to be thankful and at peace because God rules in our heart, Colossians 3:15.
2. We will “abstain from every form of evil,” (I Thessalonians 5:22) which takes away Satan’s most powerful weapon. He used some form of LUST in every recorded temptation (Amos 5:14-15).
3. There will not be an attitude of selfishness in the home. Husbands are to be as unselfish as Christ was (Ephesians 5:23). Every member of the family should submit themselves to the interest of others (Philippians 2:4 and 2 Corinthians 12:25-26).
4. There will be a sign - *No gossipers or meddlers allowed!* These influences are a huge danger to every family and forbidden by God (Proverbs 16:26, 26:20-22).

5. Be a guard against the corrupting influences of guests and visitors in the home (1 Corinthians 15:33-34 & Romans 16:17-18).

These build **the Wall** that protects this home so we can have an atmosphere that promotes growth and development.

- A. This home is a place for daily devotion to Bible study, reading and prayer.
- B. A place that contains quality Christian reading material from selected books, electronic libraries and proper websites.
- C. Provide encouragement in preparing for church services. Help children prepare their Bible lessons and teach them how to properly prepare for worship: emotionally, mentally, physically and spiritually (Malachi 1:6-14).
- D. Parents who are fully engaged in teaching, through word and deed, social skills, work ethic, and a desire to teach others the gospel are preparing their children for Heaven.
- E. A gathering place for Christian friends to engage in secular activities that have a spiritual underpinning.

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## **QUESTIONS: LESSON 5**

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1. What was Hezekiah's mistake as given in 2 Kings 20?
2. How has Satan invaded our homes?
3. How can we use "smart devices" to defeat Satan?
4. Describe your firewall used to protect yourself & your family.
5. Add to the list "what would we see in your house?"
6. What additional items can you suggest for build a "wall" around your home?

# 6

# PLANNING TO BE A LEADER

To be a valuable asset in the Lord's church takes planning by both parents and children. Training needs to begin early and requires diligent study with good examples to follow. There is a never-ending need for effective leaders in every phase of life; community, home, and the church.

There is a dire need for men and women to take the initiative in preparing themselves to be elders, preachers, deacons and teachers. Of all the problems that exist in the church today, most can be traced to a lack of leadership. To be more specific, the need for greater shepherding and less managing. Feeding and caring for the flock of God is the greatest challenge before us but also offers the greatest reward. For many years the qualifications have been over-emphasized while the study of the work of elders was not in the forefront.

**Leadership is based on inspiration,  
not domination,  
On cooperation, not intimidation.  
Wm. A Wood**

When we reflect on effective leaders, that person is almost always someone who helped others during difficult times. The more difficult the times the more valuable the service was to those who were led through the dilemma. Because we have God's promise that He will never leave us nor forsake us, we need to be busy in the work of the Lord (Hebrews 13:5-6). In Titus 2, Paul gives guidance on how we can help the generations that follow us.

"But as for you, (Titus) speak the things which are fitting for sound doctrine" (Titus 2:1). We must follow this advice or those who follow will miss the mark if we omit or add to God's word.

"Older men are to be temperate, dignified, sensible, sound in faith, in love, in perseverance" (Titus 2:2 - NAS95). Be an example worthy of being followed, holding fast to the word of truth.

"Older women likewise are to be reverent in their behavior, not malicious gossips nor enslaved to much wine, teaching what is good, so that they may encourage the young women to love their husbands, to love their children, to be sensible, pure, workers at home, kind, being subject to their own husbands, so that the word of God will not be dishonored" (Titus 2:3-5).

Can you see God's pattern for growth for Christians of all: men, women, young and older? It provides a method for spiritual maturity in each one. Hebrews 5:11-14 give us further insight into the pattern for growth; begin with milk and moving to solid food, this produces growth to full age. Proper spiritual diet and exercise moves us toward spiritual maturity. If we are having trouble understanding, the Hebrew writer says we may be "dull of hearing" (NIV "you no longer try to understand"). We can't learn if we are not listening.

*This is God's plan for moving us from students toward teachers!*

Whether we are mentoring young children, teens or college students to become, "useful to the Master, prepared for every good work" (2 Timothy 2:21) always remember the successful effort will begin with, "a mind to work" (Nehemiah 4:6). Often, that is a hard lesson to learn but can be shown by doing, "Constantly bearing in mind **your work of faith and labor of love and steadfastness of hope** in our Lord Jesus Christ in the presence of our God and Father, knowing, brethren beloved by God, His choice of you" (1 Thessalonians 1:3-4 - NAS95). We must demonstrate lessons to be learned through character qualities they can easily see lived out in our lives.

One of the greatest lessons most people can learn is the value of **edifying** others. Edify means to, "promote growth in Christian wisdom, affection, grace, virtue, holiness and blessedness." Imitating the behavior of Christ will cause others to be encouraged to follow our example, making them stronger and moving toward spiritual maturity. We encourage others by participating in public worship, instructing in Bible classes, and gaining knowledge from sermons. Every aspect of worship strengthens our relationship with God. "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11 - NAS95).

In becoming a Christian, we left behind worldly friends and their values, sacrificing the old self which had a negative influence. Fellow Christians understand the struggles and temptations faced each day and are willing to help strengthen and encourage one another. Teach those in your charge to look for peripheral members who have a difficult time becoming involved in the local church. Show them love and guidance; drawing them to a closer relationship with the Lord.

The greatest lesson to be taught is the extreme importance of knowing God's word. It is not possible to be, "useful to the Master and prepared for every good work," IF a growing knowledge of His word is not present and increasing through regular study and application in our lives.

"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God as a workman who does not need to be ashamed. **Study** to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15 - NAS95). Paul's instruction to Timothy shows us that our work is presented to God for approval, that we have the learned skills to accurately handle the word of God. We get that knowledge by study of the word, and using it daily, as a carpenter is skilled with their tools to produce a usable product.

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## **QUESTIONS: LESSON 6**

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1. When should parents begin training their children for leadership roles?
2. Explain why the need is never-ending.
3. What is shepherding?
4. Give an example of someone you view as a leader. Why?
5. List what is required to be useful to the Master.
6. What hinders many from becoming effective leaders?

**No person can be a great leader unless they take genuine interest in the success-rate of those under them.**

The principles for accomplishing this task are very simple it is the execution that can be difficult. It begins with following God’s standards which are laid out plain and simple in the scriptures. The first step is **self-control!**

“We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ” (2Co 10:5 NAS95). Every emotion and feeling of the heart must be under His control. There is no place for even *mental adultery*, the most common threat because no one else knows or is involved. BUT remember this is a “gateway” to much greater involvement with pornography, then fornication which can lead to adultery.



**Consider:** Every bad decision, every careless remark, every suggestion made without forethought is an example of *uncaptured thought*. Most often these will all be opposed to the obedience of Christ.

We will begin with suggestions that will help make the best possible relationship at home; solving many problems that can occur in the work place and social gatherings. These may not be in the order that best suits your situation, so feel free to arrange them in the way that works best for you and your spouse.

1. **Avoid temptation:** Many affairs begin one talks about personal problems with a person not their spouse; one who empathizes and expresses understanding. This can lead to a feeling of closeness and may develop into an intimate emotional and sexual relationship (Ephesians 4:27).
2. **Run from Pornography:** Recent surveys reveal that many Christians spend some time viewing pornography. Yes, even married Christians who have ignored the scriptures for a few moments of physical pleasure (James 4:7). Pornography destroys marital relationships and those involved. Scientist reveal that every time a person views pornography the images are permanently stored in the brain, causing unreal

expectations for your spouse. Pornography is highly addictive and very destructive. “Neither give place to the devil” (Ephesians 4:27).

3. **Be Romantic:** Small gestures that say, “you are always in my thoughts” such as post-it notes left in on the mirror or fridge, flowers, a bag of M & M’s, etc. The message is I chose you yesterday and I choose you today and tomorrow. Be intentionally thoughtful!
4. **Initiate Affection:** Make a conscience effort to initiate spontaneous affection with your spouse; a hug, a surprise kiss, hold hands when you are together, or cuddling without expecting sex. The physical touch is a strong bonding agent that strengthens the connection every marriage needs to survive the difficult times Satan sends.
5. **Have sex regularity:** Spouses sometime stray because their sexual needs are not being met. Research shows most couples begin to have communication problems long before problems in the bedroom. It is extremely important that couples MAKE time every day to have some meaningful conversation. When there is a deepening bond (review lesson 1- oneness) it will be harder to withdraw from your spouse because you have made an emotional investment.
6. **Share mutual interests:** When you first started dating, you had some common interests. Each worked at finding things you both enjoyed, then you got married and things began to change, jobs, kids, and busyness took away your time together. *Successful time management is a critical factor in a successful marriage.* We cannot create additional hours in the day so we must prioritize. For the sake of the children, save some time for marriage.
7. **Speak Kind words:** “Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person” (Colossians 4:6). This passage and Ephesians 4:29 are God’s instructions for proper speech. Research indicates we exchange thoughts in 3 ways: content - 15%, Tone - 50% and Nonverbal - 35%/ So be very cautious about how you speak with your expressions, eyes, hands, and tone of voice. (Review lesson 6 in “When the I Do’s are Finished”.)

The best method to Affair-Proof a marriage is to apply 2 Peter 1:5 – 9 “Now for this very reason also, applying all diligence, in your faith supply moral excellence, and in your moral excellence, knowledge, and in your knowledge, self-control, and in your self-control, perseverance, and in your perseverance, godliness, and in your godliness, brotherly kindness, and in your brotherly kindness, love. For if these qualities are yours and are increasing, they render you neither useless nor unfruitful in the true knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. For he who lacks these qualities is blind or short-sighted, having

forgotten his purification from his former sins. Therefore, brethren, be all the more diligent to make certain about His calling and choosing you; for **as long as you practice these things, you will never stumble**; (NAS95).

Practice the principles of II Peter 1  
and you will never have an affair!

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## **QUESTIONS: LESSON 7**

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1. What does affair-proof mean to you?
2. List things you can do to avoid this type temptation.
3. Name some small but meaningful things you can do to show you care for your spouse.
4. Explain the importance of how we speak is to our marriage?
5. How important is non-verbal communication in our marriage?
6. Examine 2 Peter 1:9 - How can blindness or shortsighted lead to an affair?

With the introduction of sin by Adam and Eve, came the death sentence. Most people want to live a long life but don't want to grow old. In the New Testament era people lived about 35 years (earlychurchhistory.org), by 1900 the average had risen to 46.3, then in the 1970s the average was 70.5, rising to 78.7 in 2016. Because people are living longer, we must make those days useful to our families and especially to being effective in the Lord's kingdom.

#### A Tribute to the Elderly

*I thought upon the elderly  
And whispered a prayer,  
Giving thanks to God  
For their sojourn here.*

*Such kind and gentle souls  
From generations ago,  
What they are to us  
They will never know.*

The weakening of our physical bodies is a natural part of life. Decreasing mobility becomes a problem for some, dimming of vision for others and the waning of our mental abilities has a strong effect on everyone in the home (Ecclesiastes 12). The inability to work robs us of the power to dream the youthful dreams however, we must not let the ability to share their vision for the future, coming from the experienced mind, be lost. Our seasoned seniors have a lot of experience, knowledge and wisdom to share with us before the lonely times take their toll on them. Older people are happy when busy, according to their strength. Consider Job 12:12-13, "Wisdom is with aged men. With long life is understanding. With Him are wisdom and might;

To Him belong counsel and understanding" (NAS95). Long life provides the opportunity to accumulate wisdom by experience.

The “generativity” is a term that describes an ability of seniors:

- (1) Passing on the past tradition, culture and environment.
- (2) Coaching the next generation
- (3) Fostering young adults

As a family, we owe the aged a great debt. According to Ephesians 6:2 we owe them honor. Proverbs 20:29 - NAS95 describes it as follows, “The glory of young men is their strength, And the honor of old men is their gray hair.” The family is primarily responsible to care for those of advance age (Matthew 15:1-9 & I Timothy 5:8). We also owe them respect, dignity, grace and personal care as needed (Leviticus 19:32).

Elderly people in the home is at the very least an emotional rollercoaster ride and can be difficult at times. There is a lot of joy in caring for the aged in your home, being able to develop a closer relationship than ever before, however, there is sadness that they need help with the everyday things of life.

### **Financial challenges**

In adding a person in the home, you may encounter expensive medical needs that adversely affect the family budget. Traveling to and from medical appointments, picking up meds and supplies also affect the family budget. There may be a need to employ domestic or medical help that adds to financial problems. Should the conditions become severe enough it requires they be placed in a care facility, the national average for a shared room is \$235 per day (\$7,000 month) and long-term insurance is very expensive. Plan ahead.

### **Daily Routine**

Just as a new baby changes the **daily routine**, so does an aged person in the home. Freedom of travel is often restricted if health or mobility limits them from traveling, maybe at times even to worship, visit and serve others.

### **Meals**

Dietary restrictions, dental problems and menu choices are concerns for the elderly. This can be a problem if children are in the home. The elderly like a set routine for meals and that becomes hard to follow with children and family activities.

### **Bed time**

Getting proper rest may be affected, hindered or altered which can upset the routine of the

caregiver(s). Privacy with your mate is affected, limiting time for conversation, cuddling and intimacy, which can have a long-term effect on the caregiver's relationship.

### **Relief and respite**

It is extremely important to arrange for regular periods of respite. This will allow the caregivers to maintain a proper state of mind, preventing a feeling of being overburdened that can reduce the level of care and lead to bad circumstances. It is also necessary for the family (caregivers) to find relief, so they don't feel trapped in their situation.

### **Emotional stability**

It is very troubling to see a loved one declining, physically or mentally, even though it is a natural part of life. It is still difficult to see a once strong person now needing help with even the smallest tasks. When illness/injury affects the mental ability of the elderly, the remainder of the family shares the struggles of seeing a family member unable to care for themselves.

### **Never quit**

For those who are growing older, accept the fact and then make the most of it. Never allow your life to become empty, no matter your age. Never quit serving others! Look for things you can do to encourage and strengthen others. You have so much to give. Put the emphasis on the spiritual values, regardless of the physical condition of the body. You can make a great contribution to others. The spiritual person places great value on humility, self-sacrifice, kindness and devotion to the Lord.

When I Grow Old  
When I grow old  
God grant that every child  
Will feel the youthful texture of my soul  
And will not turn from me  
As from a shade or shrunken vine.  
When I grow old,  
God grant that I may have  
Some task which must be done  
Or someone fare the worse;  
That in some corner of the earth  
Someone will need my hand  
When I grow old.  
Ethel R. Peyser

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## **QUESTIONS: LESSON 8**

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1. Explain how the increasing life span affects the care of the elderly.
2. What can we learn about aging from Ecclesiastes 12?
3. List the valuable assets possessed by seniors.
4. What changes could take place when the elderly enter the home?
5. Why should we never quit?

There are many obstacles present in every marriage but how the couple deals with them is the key to success. There is indescribable joy experienced by those who employ the God's instructions for marriage as they learn to share the fulness of agape love with each other. Adding romance, oneness, cherished friendship and physical fulfillment coupled with enduring intimacy builds a strong marriage. By contrast, love cannot grow in the same heart with negative attitudes and bad feelings such as anger, bitterness, resentment, pride, disillusionment, despair or hostility.

There is another factor that will be the focus of this lesson because of the eternal consequences for both husband and wife. An unforgiving spirit will rob you of any hope of a successful marriage or the hope of an eternal life with God. It will be a crippling blow to your marriage and to your relationship with God.

You are not required to be a helpless prisoner of your past. You should not be controlled by feelings created by past failures which place you are in a state of slavery. Because, as Christians we have been set free through forgiveness.

“Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: **forgetting what lies behind** and reaching forward to what lies ahead, **I press on toward the goal** for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippines 3: 1- 4 – NAS95). We can follow Paul's instructions moving beyond the past and striving for what is ahead – Heaven. The choice is yours.

Jesus forgave those who taunted, scourged, tortured and nailed Him to the cross. How does your treatment compare to His? He established the pattern for forgiveness for us all (Colossians 3:13).

Forgiveness is a four-step process: (1) freewill to make a deliberate choice to forgive (2) conducting ourselves in a way that is pleasing to the Lord (3) trusting God to do His part by renewing our minds and transforming our attitudes, (4) reaching out to our spouse

### **Step One**

Let's begin with instructions from God's word found in Hebrews 12: 13-15, "and make straight paths for your feet, so that the limb which is lame may not be put out of joint, but rather be healed. Pursue peace with all men, and the sanctification without which no one will see the Lord. See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it may be defiled" (NAS95). If we choose to hold onto an unforgiving spirit, then a life of crippling misery will always follow. The root of bitterness will crowd out the possibility of any good thing in life. Bitterness creates a self-designed prison from which you cannot find freedom, until you finally and completely decide to *forgive* the offender who has wronged you. Whether it is a big event or many small things over time that causes bitterness, you are commanded to forgive. There will be costs. Think what it cost God just to *forgive* even one of us, much less all of us and yet we sometimes hear a spouse vehemently state, "I will never *forgive* them for what they did to me!" Were you scourged? Spat on? Crucified? Christ forgave those who inflicted ultimate pain and death with only one of them asking for *forgiveness*. You will never have freedom from YOUR PRISON until you fully *forgive* the offender for any wrongs done to you. When you choose to forgive with your mind and will, you will free both you and the offender from the power of past events. You have now opened an avenue for the love of God to provide healing of the wrongs, wounds and bruises (Luke 4:18). There is no emotional wound, bruise or injury in your marriage that He cannot heal when we choose *forgiveness*. There is no emotion; anger, hatred, or bad attitude that can hold you prisoner when you choose *forgiveness* (freedom). Nothing can dominate you after you have chosen to allow the love of Christ to come into your life and override the old resentments.

## **Step Two – Remove and Replace**

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you” (Ephesians 4: 31-32 NAS95). It is easy to say, “I forgive you” but this verse calls us to put our words into action. **REMOVE**, put away, bad habits and **REPLACE** with kindness. When you harbor the thought, “But after what they did to me,” you have not forgiven. Be kind, tenderhearted and forgiving. There is no, “yes, but....,” in God’s word. His instructions on how to repair any relationship are very clear. The assignment of these three spiritual attributes helps us transition from bad habits to a better place where we can restore and grow a stronger relationship. When we demonstrate kindness, tender heartedness and a forgiving spirit, these are proof we have forgiven our spouse for their injurious acts. From this point on you will never weaponize the past against them, never let those thoughts dwell in your mind.

This is a turning point! When real forgiveness takes place your behavior will change, demonstrating that forgiveness has taken place. **Warning** --- if behavior is not changing you have not forgiven in the Biblical sense. **Warning** --- your soul is in danger! “Whenever you stand praying, forgive, if you have anything against anyone, so that your Father who is in heaven will also forgive you your transgressions” (Mark 11:35 NASB). When forgiveness takes place, you are able to say goodbye to the past pain and rid yourself of the effects on the present. You are now ready to move on to the third phase of removing barriers.

## **Step Three – Renovating Mind**

Before you can renovate your mind the old-self must be demolished, making room for the new. This was accomplished in Step Two so now we can begin to rebuild, renew the mind. Replace bad attitudes with spiritual-based attitudes as a foundation for a new marriage relationship. Reminder, the Christian life is all present and future because God has forgiven and forgotten the past, leaving a place for us to rebuild a life, “fit for the master’s use” 2 Timothy 2:21. This is the attitude Paul taught in Philippians 3:13, “Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do: **forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead** (NAS95). This is **HOW** you move past the old, moment of forgiveness, into the new, a life lived for the Lord.

#### **Step Four – Outreach**

Remove barriers in your life by reaching out to your spouse from your position of forgiveness. Take the initiative in seeking their forgiveness through changed behavior, demonstrated by your speech, actions and attitudes. Admit your failures and never use the word **if** or make them feel guilty. Be patient, your spouse may not respond immediately. Continue to show consistent, loving behavior that says, “I want to spend the rest of my life with you.”

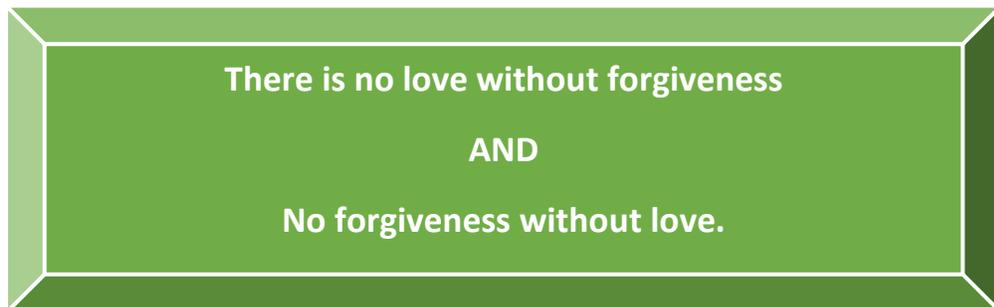
With these barriers removed the couple can complete the rebuilding of their damaged lives into a family unit of “oneness,” (Genesis 2:23 – 24 and Ephesians 5: 28 – 29). It is very possible to “live happily ever after” only in the Lord.

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## **QUESTIONS: LESSON 9**

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1. List three effects of an unforgiving spirit.
2. What is the pattern of forgiveness?
3. What are the steps in the forgiveness process? Discuss the highlights of each.



Lesson 8 which dealt with “elderly in the home,” has some similarities with this lesson. However, as we consider chronic illness and the effects on every relationship in the entire family you can see many added stresses. The daily routines will change because of the limitations of the ill member. The need for help and treatment will place additional stress on family members as they share the caregiving duties. By sharing the various responsibilities each family member can contribute to the care of the loved one and prevent the burnout of any single member.

The list of potential problems for both the patient and the caregivers can be very long and many are difficult to endure:

1. **Concern for the suffering of the patient.** Both the patient and caregivers share in the concern for the health, suffering and fear of the future. In the elderly and terminally ill, the length of the future is uncertain however, the end is certain. This evokes different emotions such as anxiety, depression, fear, uncertainty, and spiritual concerns which can lead to cognitive or mental health issues.
2. **Deterioration of partner relationship.** With declining health [physical or emotional] there is increased stress on the entire family however, when a spouse [caregiver] sees the loss of life as a reality it has a devastating effect on that relationship. Depending on the stage of life, the loss of the sexual relationship adds to the equation.
3. **Social disruption.** The caregiver may have no desire to attend social functions alone or due to responsibilities cannot attend.
4. **Physical requirements.** There are periods of time the caregiver may experience fatigue and loss of sleep, especially if the caregiver is elderly. It may be necessary to seek additional help during these times.
5. **Implication for health of caregiver.** This is a common problem for many elderly caregivers, fearing that they will not be physically able to care for the spouse.
6. **Financial burdens.** If extra help is needed, are the funds available to pay for the needed care? Planning for the future is critical, including long-term care insurance.
7. **Fear of the future.** When dealing with the unknown, which is always beyond your control, deteriorating health may rank high on the list of fears of the future. For Christians, the result may not be the concern as much as fear about the present care of the spouse. There are so many unknowns before us. Remember who is in control.
8. **Depression/anxiety.** When you look back at this long list of potential problems, the burden can be enormous. There is a single source of ever-powerful help, the God of heaven. He will provide strength, care and support, Heb 13:6, so we confidently say,

"THE LORD IS MY HELPER; I WILL NOT BE AFRAID. WHAT WILL MAN DO

9. TO ME?" The physical help will come in the form of fellow Christians acting on God's behalf and by His instructions.
10. **Positive aspects of caregiving.** The list of positives is also long and with many benefits such as the opportunity to grow even closer to a spouse of many years. The sharing of complete days, often without interruptions, provide the time to become intimately close in different ways. You share everything about this life, more time for long in-depth conversations that are meaningful and deliberate and are very gratifying.
11. **Personal point of view.** There are many ways that caring for a loved one is far beyond just duty or responsibility, even though we have that: "But if anyone does not provide for his own, and especially for those of his household, he has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever" (1 Timothy 5:8 NAS95). The most rewarding part of being a caregiver for a loved one is the sheer joy of being a servant to another. Consider the teaching in Galatians 6:1-10 focusing on verse 2 which shows the connection between bearing one another's burdens and the law of Christ. Verse 4 instructs us to examine our own work, verse 7 explains the results of our actions, "whatsoever a man sows so shall he reap," and verse 9 encourages us to not lose heart or grow weary while doing good. "So then, while we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, and especially to those who are of the household of the faith" (Galatians 6:10 NAS95).

The conclusion to the matter is having the attitude found in Genesis 48:12. Joseph was second in command of the mighty nation of Egypt but when he came before his elderly blind father, he showed him great respect and honor. This is the attitude we must demonstrate as a caregiver, never forsaking our responsibility to serve and care for them.

"You shall rise up before the gray headed and honor the aged, and you shall revere your God; I am the LORD" (Leviticus 19:32 NAS95). There is a direct connection in the commandment: honor the aged AND revere your God. It is hard to see how you can dishonor the aged and revere God, the two are tied tightly together. Our present-day culture gives no honor to the aged unless they are powerful. The strong push by the progressives to increase abortion in every possible way, genocide of the elderly cannot be far behind.

"Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, 'If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and **servant of all**'" (Mark 9:35 NAS95).

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**QUESTIONS: LESSON 10**

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1. What are the differences between “elderly” in the home in lesson 8 and the things listed in this lesson?
2. How can the family aid each other as caregivers?
3. List, in order of importance, the 10 potential problems.
4. Name 5 positive aspects in caregiving.
5. Examine Genesis 48:12. List the ways Joseph showed honor and respect to his father?
6. How does Mark 9:35 fit into this discussion?

The loss of a spouse is the greatest loss the other spouse can suffer. It is devastating and requires the largest and most challenging life adjustments that ever made. Whether the death is sudden or a long illness it is still deeply painful. There many practical considerations to make dealing with the intense emotions, numerous lifestyle changes and anxiety about the future.

**Loneliness is one of the biggest challenges:** The loss of that constant companion, the daily presence, the termination of many long-term plans and the loss of the valuable partner is difficult. The person who you shared everything with, took great comfort from their strength, humor, intellect and compassion is no longer there. One of the greatest temptations for some is to withdraw and isolate themselves at home however, Christians should reach out to the Christian family for support. A good friend of mine shared the events of his wife's long illness and death. All throughout the illness and death, family and friends were always there providing support, food and prayers. The day of the funeral came, ride to the cemetery and burial, and then everybody went their separate ways and the grieving spouse went home alone, described as the worst day of his life.

**Visual reminders of the lost love one:** The empty chair at the family table, family mementos and personal effects are everywhere in the home, however, use these same items as reminders of joy of times past, happy events, family gatherings, the precious memories.

**How do you begin again:** First, do not beat yourself up because you think you didn't do this or that for your spouse: missed some symptom or indicator that might have helped your spouse. Some feel guilty they are still alive, you may feel numb, shocked, anxious or brokenhearted. There is no "right" way to feel, everyone deals with grieve in different ways. Friends and family will attempt to comfort you but fail to have the right words because many may be grieving also. Begin by taking care of yourself, your physical health, avoid loss of appetite and trouble sleeping by seeking medical help when needed.

**Complicated Grief:** Sometimes grief is so intense it is a roadblock that hinders the ability to move forward with your life. Here are some of the signs: (1) wishing you were dead also (2) unable to perform everyday tasks (3) blaming yourself for the death of the spouse (4) feeling as if you have no purpose anymore, (5) lose all interest in social activities.

**Seek support:** Coping with the loss of a spouse is lonely and confusing and can easily move into depression. Seeking support of family, friends and fellow Christians for counsel, advice and support has proven to be an excellent choice. Support groups have been helpful to many people while dealing with the grief associated with the loss of a spouse. Seek the prayers and companionship of fellow Christians to provide support during any difficult times.

**Financial challenges:** Every situation is different, but many will have some financial decisions to make quickly. The survivor must pay bills and deal with legal matters and may not be prepared. Planning ahead is extremely important to minimize the burden on the remaining spouse. If funds are limited, a change in living situation may be needed, ideally major changes should not be made hastily if it can be avoided.

**Single again:** When your spouse has been taken by death, regardless of the span of your marriage, at first there is shock. Then loneliness sets in and finally frustration. There is a complete change in your life, daily routine and how you fulfill the needs of life. You have functioned as a team for years and now that has drastically changed. Where do you go from here?

**Take charge of your life:** Make a list of activities that will begin to give purpose to your life; redefining yourself and your life. You have been a couple for maybe decades and now you are single. It is critical to regain your energy, hope and future, moving beyond grief. Look for non-couple things to do: Plan walks with a friend, serve others by volunteering, try to stay in touch with friends and family, visit sick and shut-ins or be a mentor for those less experienced.

**Take charge of more things:** There are legal and financial matters that will need to be addressed. Make a new will to reflect the changes after the loss. Move things like property, cars, house from joint to your name. Check on insurance such as life, health & property which may require changes. When you have gained strength and courage go through personal items like clothing, jewelry, papers, etc. Some have suggested that making three piles of clothes works well; keep, give away and not sure yet. Children and grandchildren can be of help with this task.

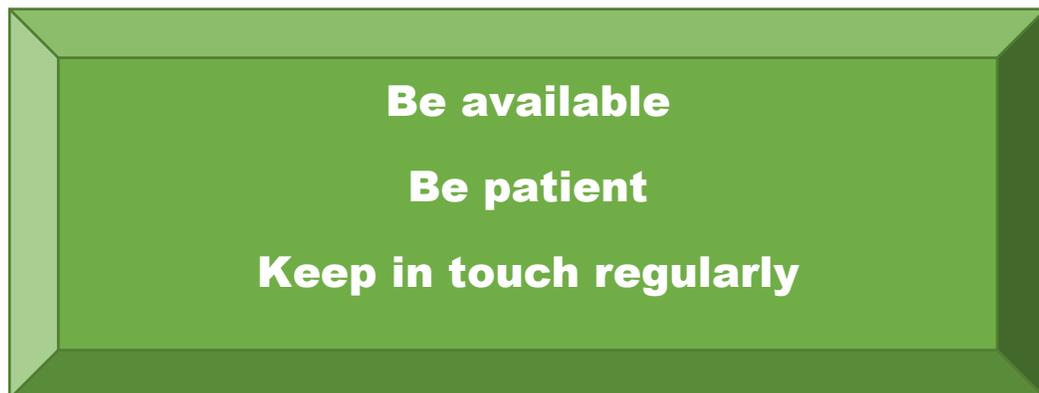
**Returning to a social life:** Probably one of the most difficult moments is rejoining any social group, especially if it is unstructured where you feel out of control of the situation. Group activities are usually the best starting point such as potlucks or picnics. Some grief counselors recommend planning your own social gathering, so you feel in control of who is invited and what to expect. This removes the feeling of aloneness and being forced to go home alone. There is no rush, take your time and move at a comfortable pace.

**To date or not:** There are varying views about whether to date or not, how soon is respectable, what is considered polite and the list goes on. It is totally up to the individual needs for companionship, emotional needs and to help fill the void left by the loss of a spouse.

**To marry and when:** There are no two sets of circumstances that are the same, so there are very few rules to follow except from the scriptures. God, through the pen of the Apostle Paul, gives instructions about remarriage. Following Paul's discussion in Romans 7:1-2 and 1 Corinthians 7:39, remarrying does not show disrespect to the deceased because godly principles are being followed.

**What to do to Help someone grieving:** The grieving spouse will need help and support a long time after the funeral, suggestions:

- (1) **Don't vanish-** be available to LISTEN -Let the grieving talk about their loss, spend as much time as possible without being intrusive.
- (2) **Let them share-** don't push for details. Let them share as they need to, encouraging them to preserve good memories on paper or recordings.
- (3) **Let them be in control-** it is tempting to begin planning things for them, don't. You may not know how the healing process is progressing, it needs to be their timetable.
- (4) **Avoid using other people's loss-** let them focus on their loss. They will need to manage the grieving process to its completion.
- (5) **Don't pressure them to "move on"-** grieving is unique to each person. They must be given the time and opportunity for closure.





The concept of successful aging has been a popular topic of discussion for many years but is still relatively undefined because of the changing definition. There is a French proverb that says, “Forty is the old age of youth and fifty is the youth of old age.” However, there is no inherent value in age because it is what you do with the years you have been given; accomplishments determine the value.

In Ecclesiastes 12:1-7 Solomon deals with the symptoms of bodily and mental ageing, the opportunities of age and the natural termination of old age.

**Reality of growing old:** Most want to live a long time but resist the idea of growing old. Remember that everything God created has a growth pattern, including mankind. Facing the reality of growing old is one of the keys to being successful in the aging process. Solomon provides us with insight about how the body loses strength with age, but he also provides us with instruction on how to use the maturity acquired over the years. The word maturity means, “full development,” and it describes the wisdom and judgement that we should gather as we pass through this life. Ecclesiastes 12: 13-14 tells us how to use the wisdom and judgement to be pleasing to God.

**Staying healthy as you age:** Research has shown that another key is to maintain functional ability by staying physically and mentally active. This becomes much more difficult because of health issues such as arthritis, high blood pressure, heart disease and mental health. Proper diet and reasonable exercise will aid in combating the onset of physical decline. The same is true with fighting the loss of cognitive function by being mentally active, exercising the brain on a constant basis. “The conclusion, when all has been heard, is fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

**Social connections aids with emotional health:** Rowe & Kahn writes, “successful aging is multidimensional encompassing the avoidance of disease and disability, the maintenance of high physical and cognitive function and sustained engagement in social and productive activities.” An academic way of saying STAY BUSY, don’t allow your storehouse of wisdom be wasted.

**Retrospection:** This is a common characteristic of aging and can be profitable however, don’t live in the past. Learn from mistakes, don’t be doomed to make them again. The wise can also help the inexperienced avoid making the same mistakes by mentoring. Share the experiences of God’s love, mercy, compassion and loving kindness. There is great joy in knowing that one has faithfully served the Lord (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

**Review the past:** God is merciful and forgiving, seek that forgiveness for anything that remains in the past.

In much of the Old Testament, God continually reminds the Israelites of the land of promise; a land flowing with milk and honey, a land where God would dwell with them. After they received the promised land and were living in it David spoke of another promise from God, “O LORD my God, in You I have taken refuge; Save me from all those who pursue me, and deliver me” (Psalms 7:1, NAS95). Many other verses reference God as providing for His people. The promised Messiah is referenced over 300 times before He arrived in the New Testament. In John 10:9 Jesus said, “I am the door,” and in John 14:6 Jesus said, “I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.” God provides access to the promise of forgiveness leading to the remission of sins to all who will obey. John the Baptist saw Jesus coming to him and said, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world! (John 1:29 NAS95).

In Titus 2:11-14 Paul announced that God had completed His work of redemption and salvation, instructing us to, “deny ungodliness and worldly desires and live sensibly, righteously and godly in the present age,” (Titus 2:12). We have been given the proper instructions on how to please God and verse 13 sets the goal for the very purpose of life, looking for the blessed HOPE, Jesus Christ. Hope of being with Christ must be the **driving** force within our lives, regardless of our age. Without this hope there is no joy, which is a defining characteristic of the Christian life. Because of the bumps, bruises and effects of aging in this life, we can lose our focus on the **joy** of knowing we are in Christ. **Joy** is one of the fruits of the Spirit, Galatians 5:22. **Joy is a state of mind**, different from happiness which is conditioned by what is happening around us.

Redemption and forgiveness of sins are the foundation of **joy** and a by-product of purity in our character and faithfulness to God.

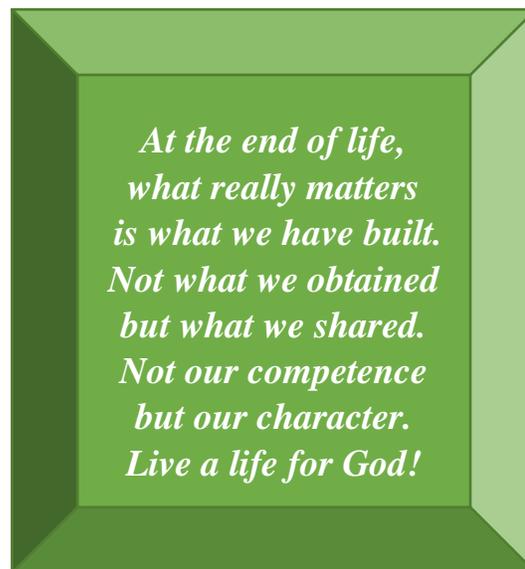
Additionally, we can **rejoice** that our names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20) because of faithful obedience to the will of God. Hebrews 12:1ff speaks of those who have run the race with endurance having their eyes fixed on Jesus being enrolled in heaven (12:23).

We also have obtained mercy (1 Peter 2:10) because of the great love God had for mankind, freely justifying us by His grace, allowing us to become heirs, joint heirs with Christ (Romans 8:17).

The Apostle Paul made these thoughts clear, “Not that I have already obtained it or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus. Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but one thing I do:

forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 3:12-14, NAS95)

What Paul stated very clearly is that we must be “**going toward God**” every day we live on this earth. Everything God created has a growth pattern and man is no exception. 2 Peter 3:18 is not directed just to the young but to all going toward God, regardless of the obstacle’s in our way. We all are moving in some direction every day, not standing still, we are growing or declining every day. Yes, the body is declining every day from birth to death, (2 Corinthians 4:16). However, **the** most important aspect is the inner man is renewed day by day, moving toward immortality! This will happen through a planned, focus effort of commitment to spiritual growth. Moving toward God will not happen by accident, haphazardly but spiritual growth, moving toward God, is at the very top of our “to do list” every day.



1Peter 1 contains some of the most meaningful thoughts on the subject of “moving toward God.” Let us focus and God’s words using them as a driving force, especially as aging takes its toll on the body (and it will) to be on the move toward God.

“In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ; and though you have not seen Him, you love Him, and though you do not see Him now, but believe in Him, you greatly rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, obtaining as the outcome of your faith the **salvation of your souls**” (1 Peter 1:6-9).

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## QUESTIONS: LESSON 11

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1. What other ways did the scriptures describe Jesus beside a “door?”
2. List the do’s and don’ts in the Titus 2 reference.
3. Describe the driving force in your life?
4. Explain how joy effects your spiritual life?
5. How do you plan to “move toward God?”
6. How does the following quote fit into following the word of God?

**Generativity**—defined as:

*Passing on the past tradition*

*Coaching the next generation*

*Fostering young adults*

