

ADVANCING GOD'S KINGDOM: GROWING IN THE LIKENESS OF JESUS

INTRODUCTION

Challenging times: We are living in challenging times. Evil, turmoil, broken relationships, addictions, divisions, wars, and terrorism, are troubling the earth. On the other hand, these are also exciting times as the Spirit of God is moving across the earth in power transforming people's lives, homes, and communities. GOD'S KINGDOM IS ADVANCING WITH POWER! In some parts of the world, more people are coming to know the transforming power of Jesus than ever before in the history of civilization! Hallelujah!

Longing for spiritual renewal in North America: Here in the United States, we long to see greater spiritual transformation in our personal lives, marriages, families, congregations, communities and in the nation as a whole. Satan, the great deceiver, in these last days is distorting the truth of God's Word in unprecedented ways. George Barna, a Christian researcher, shares the following results after his organization interviewed 10,000 people in the United States.

- 84 percent said their religious faith is very important in their own life
- 70 percent claimed that their own religious faith is consistently growing deeper
- 84 percent claimed to be Christians
- 60 percent said they believe the Bible is totally accurate in all that it teaches
- 75 percent said they are absolutely or somewhat committed to Christianity.

The above facts look fairly good. However, the same people also deemed the following behaviors and lifestyles "morally acceptable":

- Cohabitation (living together outside of marriage)—60 percent
- Abortion—45 percent (In the U.S., nearly 45 million babies have been sacrificed since the Roe v. Wade decision that legalized abortion in 1973.)
- adultery—42 percent
- sexual relations between homosexuals—30 percent
- gambling—61 percent
- pornography—38 percent
- use of profanity—36 percent

What's wrong with this picture? Either people are ignorant of the Word of God or choose to disobey.

Sadly, God's Kingdom has limited advancement because many so-called "Christians" have this kind of distorted mentality and inexcusable behavior as a Christian. We need revival! Seeking and receiving a revelation of the Kingdom of God and what it means to grow in the likeness of Jesus will not only transform our lives, families, and congregations, but will mightily impact our communities and nation for the glory of God!

PURPOSE OF THIS TEACHING:

1. Give foundational understanding to the meaning of the Kingdom of God
2. Understand the relationship between advancing God's Kingdom and growing in the likeness of Jesus
3. Learn the Biblical basis for growing in the likeness of Jesus

DESIRED GOALS OF THE TEACHING:

1. Search the Scriptures in order to understand how to grow in the likeness of Jesus
2. Allow the Holy Spirit to bring spiritual transformation to our personal life, marriage, homes, congregations, relationships, and communities as we *choose* to make personal application of the Biblical truths to our life
3. Provide a Biblical outline that can be easily reproduced for teaching and edification

HOW THE TEACHING CAN BE USED:

1. Small group setting such as cell groups or Sunday school classes
2. General teaching and Discipleship training
3. Personal Bible Study

ADDITIONAL NOTES:

1. The notes are available in teacher format which includes the entire outline or with blanks to be filled in for students who are in a class or small group.
2. Special attention should be given to the "call to action" as it is in practical application that change takes place. Read James 1:22-25. Have students write their responses and hopefully be accountable to another person with their action plan.
3. Verses are not written on the outline in order to have persons search the Scriptures. In this way, you can also see the context of the verse.
4. The outline and verses given are certainly not exhaustive. Please search for additional Scriptures that you feel will be helpful.
5. The points given are not exhaustive. Feel free to add your own insights.
6. There may be repetition at times. That is good in order to reinforce the Word of the Lord.

PERMISSION TO USE THIS BIBLE STUDY:

This teaching can be reproduced as long as there is no charge associated with it other than the cost of printing, if that is necessary. If you desire to download the original copies to your computer, contact me at: henrymillieb@verizon.net. For anyone using the teaching, I would appreciate if you would let me know at the above e-mail address so that I can know if the outline is serving a need and most importantly so that I can pray for you as you teach. "Equipping the saints" with Christ's love, Henry Buckwalter, Bishop/Overseer - Harvest Fellowship of Churches

GROWING IN THE LIKENESS OF JESUS

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LESSON 1

HOW BRIGHT IS MY LIGHT?

Growing in the likeness of Jesus:

Barry attended a public high school where there were very few believers. Being a strong believer in Jesus, he felt led to carry his Bible on the top of his other books as he would go from class to class. It was a constant reminder of where he drew his strength. It was also a silent witness to others that the Bible was his guide and not the unholy culture around him. Barry wasn't a forceful witness but his daily habit was noticed by others. Sometimes they called him "the righteous one" or "the holy one." While the words were meant to ridicule and irritate him, he found God's grace keeping him calm.

One day, however, while walking in the hall, a boy came from behind and shoved the Bible from the stack of books he was carrying unto the floor. Since the hall was full of students some stumbled over it, tearing a couple of pages. At first, Barry felt a righteous anger and wanted to pin the guy to the locker and give him a piece of his mind. He managed to refrain. God's peace permeated his soul. Barry's light shone brightly!

Was it wrong for Barry to have that feeling of anger rise up in him? What are qualities of Christ-likeness in the life of Jared?

A. Key verse: Acts 4:13 – The lives of Peter and John reflected the likeness of Jesus and impacted their community. How?

B. Key thought: For God's Kingdom to advance, it is vitally necessary as His Children to grow in the likeness of Jesus.

C. Why is it important to grow in the likeness of Jesus?

1. End-time living requires holy living. (I Peter 1:13-16; II Peter 3:9-13)
2. True Kingdom believers must and will fully represent the King. (II Corinthians 5:17-21)
3. True believers are "the light of the world." (Matthew 5:14-16)
4. The love of Christ working through us breaks down barriers. (Acts 10:27-48)
5. Kingdom advancement requires decisive action: discipline; commitment; loyalty. (I Corinthians 9:24-27; Mark 8:34-37)

D. We are living in times when many so-called Christians do not fully represent the likeness of Jesus. What is the result?

1. Hypocrisy that leads to cynicism. What does this mean?
2. Ineffectiveness in changing communities and cities. Why?
3. Lack of spiritual growth and maturity. How is this true?
4. Breakdown of relationships. Why does this happen?
5. Bring shame to the name of Jesus. How?

E. Summary:

Without growing in the likeness of Jesus, the Kingdom of God will not advance.

F. Action steps: (James 1:22-25)

Is there anything in my life as a Christian that may hinder Kingdom advancement?

If so what?

What steps will I take to overcome and become more like Jesus?

LESSON 2

WHO IS MY KING?

Following the crowd:

Crystal grew up in a Christian home. She regularly went to Sunday school and at an early age asked Jesus to come into her life. However, in her early teens she began to hang out with the wrong crowd. She started to attend parties where ungodly things were taking place and also lied to her parents about her un-Christlike behavior. At first her conscience really bothered her because she knew her disobedience was grieving God and would also hurt her parents if they knew about her lifestyle. Sometimes she would cry at nights and ask God to forgive her. But after some time, her personal devotion to God lessened, going to church was a real bore, and the pleasure of hanging out with the wrong crowd became her ultimate source of enjoyment. Her parents were concerned about her attitude toward the Lord and the church. They talked to her and prayed for her. One night, for the first time, she got drunk at a party and while driving home lost control of the car and ended up in the hospital with serious injuries. The truth of her lifestyle became fully evident. Her parents were shocked but forgiving. Fortunately, the event was a turning point in her life. However, by not allowing Jesus to be KING in her life she paid a high price, spiritually, emotionally, and physically. Today, Crystal is allowing Jesus to daily be the Lord of her life and she is living a productive life in the Kingdom of God!

Discuss the downward spiral in Crystal's life. Why did this happen? What are issues that she probably had to overcome and may still deal with in her life?

- A. Key verse:** Matthew 11:12 – What is the meaning of this verse?
- B. Key thought:** In a very simple statement, it can be said that the Kingdom of God is the rule of God. So we must ask the following questions, “Who is ruling my life? Is it JESUS or do I allow SELF to rule my life?”
- C. Why is it so important that King Jesus rule my life and not self?**
1. There can only be one master in our life (Luke 6:46-49; 9:57-62).
 2. Allowing self to rule brings destruction (Galatians 6:8-9; Romans 8:12-14).
 3. Absolute surrender to the rule of God brings blessing, peace, and endurance to face even the most difficult circumstances in life (Luke 22:39-43; Acts 7:54-60).
 4. A true believer will identify with both the death and resurrected life of Jesus (Romans 6:5-10; Galatians 2:20-21).
 5. We become living witnesses to the life of Jesus to others (Acts 8:4-7).

D. Why emphasize the importance of the Kingdom of God?

1. Jesus preached, taught, and demonstrated the Kingdom (Matthew 4:23; 5:3, 19-20; 6:10).
2. Jesus said we are to seek the Kingdom first (Matthew 6:33).
3. Jesus taught about the Kingdom to his disciples before he went back to heaven (Acts 1:3).
4. The disciples spoke about the Kingdom (Act 8:12; 14:22).
5. Paul preached about the Kingdom in the last days at the end of his ministry (Acts 28:30-31).

E. Summary:

Getting a revelation of God's Kingdom and its purpose and power in our lives will transform the way we think and act. Allowing Jesus and not self to rule our life will help us to grow more in the likeness of Jesus.

F. Action steps: (James 1:22-25)

Does Jesus rule every part of my life?

If not, what steps will I take to become more like Jesus?

LESSON 3

WHAT'S MY DESTINY?

Struggling with destiny:

Alicia really struggled with her identity. She had issues with rejection from her father, struggled with her weight, did not have the finances to buy designer clothes like many of her peers, and in group settings had a difficult time fitting in. Alicia was a Christian but found it hard to believe that God could love a person like her. She tried hard to be a Christian but often found it hard to live a victorious life. She would listen to teachings by pastors and teachers on how important she was to God but it seemed to her like a distant dream. How could God ever accept her? Her attempts to read the Bible seemed like religious drudgery. Watching a sitcom on TV brought a lot more enjoyment. At nights she would lie in her bed awake and dream about being accepted and living victoriously, but knew it would never be possible. "I'm a hopeless case," she thought. No future. No life. No hope. On Sunday she would once again drag herself to church, get a little charged up in her spirit, but by Sunday evening was once again back in the "pits".

What was going on in Alicia's life? Remember, she professed to be a believer. What is her solution?

- A. Key verse:** II Corinthians 3:17-18 – How does this verse relate to your destiny as a believer?
- B. Key thought:** The destiny of every believer in Jesus Christ is to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus. If this is true, why do so many Christians struggle to grow in the likeness of Jesus?
- C. Our destiny as defined by the Bible:**
1. We were created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). What does this mean to you?
 2. Sin destroyed that image but Jesus restored it (Romans 5:12-17). How is what Jesus did for us described in contrast to Adam's sin? How is "reigning in life" related to our ability to grow in the likeness of Jesus (Verse 17)?
 3. We've been predestined to be transformed into the likeness of His Son (Jesus) (Romans 8:28-32). So what does it mean in verse 29 to "be conformed to the likeness or image of his Son? Is this possible?
 4. We have the mind of Christ (I Corinthians 2:16; John 15:15). So how does this relate to growing in the likeness of Jesus? Paul also said that we should have the "mind" or "attitude" of Christ (Philippians 2:5).

5. We are called to be imitators of God (Ephesians 5:1). Does the standard seem to be higher than we can achieve?
6. One day, we will come to a full manifestation of His likeness (I John 3:2). That will be a glorious day.

D. Knowing our God-given destiny should motivate us to:

1. Seek God's will as to how it is possible to achieve this high standard.
2. Live with the assurance that it's possible to grow in the likeness of Jesus.
3. Overcome the lies of Satan that tell me I'll never achieve God's destiny for my life.

E. Summary:

God's destiny for every believer is very simple but profound: We are to grow in the likeness of Jesus. It's only possible through the cross of Jesus.

F. Action steps: (James 1:22-25)

Do I view my destiny of growing in the likeness of Jesus an option or a command? Explain.

On a scale from 1 to 10 (1=little and 10=very strong), how would I rate my progress as a Kingdom believer in fulfilling my destiny as it relates to my growing in the likeness of Jesus? _____ (This question is not meant to condemn but to motivate progress in fulfilling your God-given destiny.)

LESSON FOUR

WHAT AM I REFLECTING? (Part 1)

One man's powerful demonstration of Christ-like love and compassion:

Bob was one of those guys that everyone liked to be around. At his place of employment he was joyful, quick to give a helping hand, worked diligently, and had a ready smile. At home he was faithful and loyal to his wife and family. However, there was one guy in Bob's life that tested his character to the limit. Jack worked with Bob as a machinist and seemed to despise Bob's Christ-like character. Through unrepeatable words and actions, it seemed Jack's goal in life was to "crucify" Bob. Bob did everything to love him. He actually liked the challenge.

One day, word circulated through the shop that Jack was diagnosed with cancer in an advanced stage. Bob prayed for wisdom on how to respond. In his natural mind he could have imagined that with Jack out of his life, all would be peaceful. However, with the love and compassion of Jesus in his heart, he pursued a plan of action with guidance by the Holy Spirit. He redoubled his prayers for Jack and invited others to do the same. At the Spirit's prompting, Bob and his wife went to see Jack and his wife in the hospital. At first, Bob's words of love and comfort were met with downcast eyes from Jack. But Bob's warm smile and cheerful attitude seemed to warm the atmosphere and the Spirit of God enveloped that hospital room. Jack's hard heart began to break and mellow, and that day, for the first time in fifteen years, he responded to Bob's love and compassion. A short time later, he also surrendered his life to Jesus, testifying to Bob's unfailing love to him which was, of course, an overflow of Christ's love in Bob's heart.

What are the Christ-like character qualities you see in Bob's character? What do you think enabled Bob to be persistent in his love for Jack?

A. Key verses: Hebrews 12:1-3 - If our destiny is to grow in the likeness of Jesus, then we must observe the life and character of He who is our model. Note that Jesus is both the "author and the finisher of our faith." That gives hope. Also, we are to consider the life of Jesus and in doing so we will persevere in our life. So, let's begin to "consider" the life of Jesus and learn from Him.

B. Key thought: We are challenged to not only reflect (consider) the life of Jesus but also reflect (demonstrate) his life to others. In doing so, God's Kingdom will advance.

Please note: This is not a comprehensive study on the doctrine of Jesus Christ. The emphasis on this study is to reflect on who he is. Yes, He is the son of God. But remember, we are "*being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory*" (II Corinthians 3:18).

C. Divine qualities in the life of Jesus: (Each quality could be a complete study)

1. Love – One could say that everything that Jesus did was motivated by love, be it a healing, a rebuke, a word of encouragement, an ultimately the cross (I John 3:16).

-Jesus exhorts Kingdom believers to love: (John 13:34; Matthew 5:43-46; 22:34-40)

-What is unconditional love and where do you find it the most difficult to demonstrate? How can Christ's love be more fully developed in our life? Give an illustration where love demonstrated to you impacted your life.

2. Compassion – The Gospels for full of passages where Jesus manifested compassion. Note in the in the following passages what stirred up compassion in him: (Matthew 9:35-38; 14:14; 20:29-34)

-Peter exhorts us to have compassion – (I Peter 3:8)

-What hinders us from having compassion? How is compassion developed? Is it possible to have too much compassion?

3. Defender of truth – While Jesus demonstrated a lot of love and compassion, he also defended truth. I believe His defense of truth also flowed out of love and compassion (Matthew 21:12-17; Luke 11:37-46). Jesus was “full of grace and truth” (John 1:14). What is the importance of balancing grace and truth?

-Paul exhorts us to speak and live the truth (Ephesians 4:15, 25; 6:14).

D. Having these three Christ-like qualities in our life should motivate us to be led by the Holy Spirit to:

1. Live a life of unconditional love
2. Become for sensitive to people around us and demonstrate compassion
3. Balance our love and compassion with the truth of God's Word, even when it hurts.

E. Summary:

As true representatives of Jesus Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, we will reflect the character of Jesus with unconditional love, compassion, and truth.

F. Action steps: (James 1:22-25)

Regarding these three basic character qualities where am I tested the most? Do I seem to hit a limit and then fail? How is God asking me to grow in these areas?

LESSON FIVE

WHAT AM I REFLECTING? (Part 2)

Overcoming betrayal:

At age 21, Katie had a very promising future. She just graduated from college with a teaching degree and looked forward to her new position as a 1st grade teacher. Katie was a committed Christian and while in college overcame the peer pressure of an unholy lifestyle that was so prevalent around her. Katie had a friend (she thought she was a true friend) who unknowingly to Katie was inwardly jealous of her achievements. While Shirley was a professing Christian, she often was on the fence with her conduct. Katie prayed for her and challenged her to be more faithful in her commitment. Katie had no idea concerning the inward turmoil going on in Shirley regarding Katie's success and holy lifestyle.

One day Katie received a letter from another friend back at the college. In it she shared a rumor that was circulating at the college that Katie was not as pure and holy as everyone thought. It was rumored that Katie was having an immoral relationship with some guy. The source of the rumor pointed to Shirley. Katie was hurt, angry, and all kinds of emotions flooded her soul. How could her best friend betray her?

To make a long story short, Shirley owned up to her gossip. She asked for Katie's forgiveness which after much prayer, agony, and reflection Katie offered. But damage was done that would be hard to undo.

If you were in Katie's shoes, how would you respond? Was Katie justified in taking time to respond to Shirley's behavior? Describe the effects of un-Christlike character.

Note: The key verses and thought will be repeated in each part of these lessons, "What Am I Reflecting" to reemphasize the truths.

- A. Key verses:** Hebrews 12:1-3 - If our destiny is to grow in the likeness of Jesus, then we must observe the life and character of He who is our model. Note that Jesus is both the *"author and the finisher of our faith."* That gives hope. Also, we are to consider the life of Jesus and in doing so we will persevere in our life. So, let's begin to "consider" the life of Jesus and learn from Him.
- B. Key thought:** We are challenged to not only reflect (consider) the life of Jesus but also reflect (demonstrate) his life to others. In doing so, God's Kingdom will advance.

Please note: This is not a comprehensive study on the doctrine of Jesus Christ. The emphasis on this study is to reflect on who he is. Yes, He is the son of God. But remember, we are *"being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory"* (II Corinthians 3:18).

- C. Divine qualities in the life of Jesus continued:** (Each quality could be a complete study)

1. Prayer – We can truly say that prayer was foundational to the ministry of Jesus (Mark 6:46; Luke 6:12; 9:28; John 17:9, 15). After reading Mark 1:25-38, how did praying affect the ministry of Jesus?

-Jesus exhorts us to pray. In each reference, note the reason: (Matthew 5:44; 6:9-13; 9:37-38; 26:41). While Jesus is Lord of the universe, he invites us to partner with Him in fulfilling His will and purpose on earth.

2. Forgiveness – The dynamic and love-filled life of Jesus was marked by rejection, religious opposition, accusations, threats, and ultimately the crucifixion. In the midst of all of these situations, Jesus demonstrated forgiveness (Luke 23:34).

-Jesus exhorts us to forgive (Matthew 6:12-15; Mark 11:25). What are the consequences of unforgiveness? Does forgiving a person mean that we excuse what they did? Rick Warren says, “Forgiveness must be immediate but trust takes time.” Do you agree or disagree with this statement?

-Paul exhorts us to forgive (Ephesians 4:32). Unforgiveness is one of the biggest hindrances to Christian growth. Why?

-We must receive God’s forgiveness paid for by the blood of Jesus on the cross: (Ephesians 1:7-8; Colossians 2:13). Until we get a growing revelation of God’s forgiveness to us as believers, it will be difficult to forgive others. Why?

D. Having these three Christ-like qualities in our life should motivate us to be led by the Holy Spirit to:

1. Pray with consistency and fervency knowing that it’s an honor to partner with God in fulfilling his purposes in our lives and on the earth.
2. Receive and release the forgiveness of Christ so that we can be free of any hindrance in our life.

E. Summary:

As true representatives of Jesus Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, we will reflect the character of Jesus with prayer and forgiveness.

F. Action steps: (James 1:22-25)

Regarding these two basic character qualities where am I tested the most? Do I seem to hit a limit and then fail? How is God asking me to grow in these areas?

LESSON SIX

WHAT AM I REFLECTING? (Part 3)

Service in the name of Jesus:

Brad and Sarah Smith moved next door to an elderly man, Mr. Bennett, who really preferred to stay close to himself.

Brad and Sarah, seeking the Lord's help and wisdom, tried to reach out to Mr. Bennet. Since he had no immediate family, they invited him for Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner. He rejected the invitation. Sarah took some cookies which when opening the front door he growled in a low tone, "set them on the porch." Several months went by and there was no apparent breakthrough.

One cold October day, a strong nor'easter hit their city. A large limb fell in Mr. Bennett's backyard cutting the electric lines to his house. It remained cold, windy, and raining. The Smiths observed Mr. Bennett hobbling around the back yard on his can surveying the damage. Putting on his coat, Brad went to Mr. Bennett's yard to offer his assistance. Mr. Bennett told him that it would take two day before the current would be restored because of so many homes being damaged.

Brad invited Mr. Bennett to the warmth of their home which he reluctantly accepted. Once inside, however, the Smiths could see his relief, especially when Sarah offered him a fresh bowl of hot soup. He ended up staying with the Smiths for three days until his repairs were accomplished. Meanwhile, Brad sawed the limbs providing much needed firewood for Mr. Bennett as he faced the winter.

To this day, Mr. Bennett is still resisting God's plan of salvation but the Smith's believe the day of his redemption is not far away.

On the part of the Smiths, how are a servant's heart, humility, and overall ministry manifested in this story? What is the key to a possible breakthrough? Does humble and Christ-like ministry guarantee results?

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- A. Key verses:** Hebrews 12:1-3 - If our destiny is to grow in the likeness of Jesus, then we must observe the life and character of He who is our model. Note that Jesus is both the *"author and the finisher of our faith."* That gives hope. Also, we are to consider the life of Jesus and in doing so we will persevere in our life. So, let's begin to "consider" the life of Jesus and learn from Him.
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But remember, we are *“being transformed into His likeness with ever-increasing glory”* (II Corinthians 3:18).

C. Divine qualities in the life of Jesus continued: (Each quality could be a complete study)

1. Servant heart – The whole life and ministry of Jesus was marked by service to others (Matthew 20:28; John 13:1-13). How would you characterize the service of Jesus in contrast to the religious leaders?

-Jesus exhorts Kingdom believers to serve (Luke 22:26).

2. Humility – Jesus demonstrated humility in every aspect of his life—his service, healing, ministry to the hopeless. Humility is the hallmark of the Kingdom of God. Jesus ultimate act of humility was his obedience to the death on the cross (Philippians 2:5-11).

-Jesus exhorts Kingdom believers to be humble (Matthew 18:4; 23:12).

-James and Peter call for humility (James 4:6-10; I Peter 5:5-6).

-How can you recognize when pride is in control of one’s life instead of humility? How can you assist a believer who is showing pride but doesn’t recognize it?

3. Ministry of healing and deliverance – Everywhere Jesus went He was confronted with human suffering. With divine authority and anointing he reached out to those in society that others rejected (Mark 1:40-42; 7:31-35; 10:46-52) and many more.

-Jesus delegated Kingdom authority supernatural ministry (John 14:10-12).

-The early church operated in God’s divine authority (Acts 3:6-7; 8:48).

-James invites us to anoint the sick with oil (James 5:13-16)

D. Having these three Christ-like qualities in our life should motivate us to be led by the Holy Spirit to:

1. Serve out of a spirit of Christ’s love and for His glory and not for personal recognition.

2. See that in the Kingdom of God, humility is the bottom-line character trait of a true servant of God.

3. Minister with the power and anointing of the Holy Spirit knowing we have the authority of Jesus to do so.

E. Summary:

As true representatives of Jesus Christ, filled with the Holy Spirit, we will reflect the character of Jesus with humble service and anointed ministry.

F. Action steps: (James 1:22-25)

What is God asking of me in my service for Him? Is there any pride in my life that God wants me to deal with? If so, what? Does service leave me feeling exhausted or fulfilled?

LESSON SEVEN

WHAT AM I REFLECTING? (Part 4)

From selfishness to surrender:

Ted loved to dress in the latest styles. He was a sharp dresser. Among the many shoes, one pair was so shiny that when he looked down at them he could practically see to comb his hair. Clothes filled his closets for every occasion. When things would get a little tight in the closet he relieved his conscience by taking some of those that he never really liked to Goodwill. But soon every slot and shelf was filled again.

One day Ted heard a message concerning the needs of the poor. In his mind he thought if they would only work as hard as he did, they could look like him. While perhaps in some cases that was true, in other situations people were caught in circumstances beyond their control. He had long become immune to the needs of refugees that flooded the TV screen from time to time. "Some aid organization will meet their need," he thought.

However, the Holy Spirit was tightening the screws on Ted. One day, his pastor informed the congregation of a dire need in their midst, a single mom with a very sick child. There was loss of wages and extra medical bills. He gave out of sympathy. Then he heard a sermon on surrendering everything to God. That night, he lay in bed, unable to sleep and the Holy Spirit penetrated his softened heart and exposed the selfishness and lust for more things. Praise God, there was an awaking in his heart of his impoverish soul and a brokenness to confess his indifference to the needs of the poor. Getting out of bed, he knelt and prayed, "Lord, I surrender everything, my wealth, my desire for clothes, my insensitivity to the poor, ...I surrender all to you.

Jed began a new journey of joyfully not only giving his tithe but sacrificially giving money to the needs of others in place of fulfilling the desires of his own heart.

Note: The key verses and thought will be repeated in each part of these lessons, "What Am I Reflecting" to reemphasize the truths.

- A. Key verses:** Hebrews 12:1-3 - If our destiny is to grow in the likeness of Jesus, then we must observe the life and character of He who is our model. Note that Jesus is both the *"author and the finisher of our faith."* That gives hope. Also, we are to consider the life of Jesus and in doing so we will persevere in our life. So, let's begin to "consider" the life of Jesus and learn from Him.

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C. Divine qualities in the life of Jesus continued: (Each quality could be a complete study)

1. Care for the poor and hungry – When the multitudes came to hear Jesus preach, He fed them (John 6:1-4; Mark 8:1-13). What do we learn in these events about Jesus' provision?

-Jesus expects us to feed the poor and hungry (Matthew 25:31-46).

-Paul teaches about the importance of helping the poor (Galatians 2:10; Romans 15:26-27). The early church organized to meet the needs of widows (Acts 6:1-7)

-How does one know when and how to meet the needs of the poor? In our generosity and attempt to help the poor can we actually be a hindrance?

2. Complete Surrender – Notice the words of Jesus in John 6:38. What does he mean by those words? He made a complete surrender in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matthew 26:39).

-Why is absolute surrender to the will of God necessary if we are to grow in the likeness of Jesus? What happens when we resist the will of God?

D. Having these three Christ-like qualities in our life should motivate us to be led by the Holy Spirit to:

1. Reach out to the poor and the hungry with compassionate but discerning hearts.
2. Surrender my life completely to King Jesus!

E. Summary:

In the last four lessons, we've very briefly observed the life and character of Jesus. This has included: love; compassion; defending the truth; prayer; forgiveness; servant heart; humility; ministry of healing and deliverance; care for the poor and complete surrender.

There is so much more to examine in the life of Jesus but hopefully this teaching will motivate you to discover those additional character qualities and the practical implications for your life.

We've seen that God has a destiny for us to grow in the likeness of Jesus. We've studied some of His qualities which we aspire to reflect in our life. However, we might ask the question, "How can we do this?" We try and often fall flat leaving us defeated, frustrated, and convicted. If God's destiny is for us to be transformed into the likeness of Jesus then He will also make a way for that to happen. We will look at the foundations for Christ-likeness in the following lessons.

F. Action steps: (James 1:22-25)

Regarding the call to help the poor, I believe God is asking me to....

What in my life do I find hard to surrender? Am I willing to lay that (whatever) on God's altar? If so, what are the next steps to walking this out in my life?

LESSON EIGHT

HOW STRONG IS MY FOUNDATION? – Part 1

Proper foundations are important:

The following is a true story. Several years ago, a man that lived a bit more than a mile from our house decided to jack up a one-story storage shed in order to build a new first floor below the original structure. He managed to elevate the shed to the desired height, even a bit above, so that he had room to build the lower structure. Unfortunately, while he was working below the temporarily elevated shed, something in the foundation suddenly shifted and the whole building collapsed crushing and killing the man. What a shock for his wife to discover him in this state.

Needless to say, proper foundations are very important for any building. A general principle is this: The higher the building, the deeper the foundation. In Belize City where we lived for many years, huge concrete buildings with several floors were built on a swamp. How was this possible? Thirty-five foot pilings were pounded through the swamp to the rock below. Thus the buildings were secure, even in hurricanes.

As a Kingdom believer, if we are going to reflect the likeness of Jesus in our life, we must have a secure foundation in order to do this. Christ-likeness is not automatic. It's an overflow that springs from a strong foundation.

- A. Key verse:** I Corinthians 3:10-11- Paul says we are to be careful how we build. The man in the above story probably thought he was being careful but there was a flaw. Paul goes on to say that Jesus alone is our only foundation.

- B. Key thought:** If the man in the illustration above would have applied the correct laws of science, the house would have stood. When we build on the principles of God's Word with Jesus as our foundation, we will reflect an ever-increase likeness to Jesus in our life.

- C. Foundational principles for growing in the likeness of Jesus.**
 - 1. Express genuine repentance – Repentance means turning around and going in a new direction. John the Baptist and Jesus preached that in order to enter the Kingdom of God one must repent (Matthew 3:1-2; Mark 1:14-15).

-On the day of Pentecost, Peter preached repentance (Acts 2:38).

-How can genuine repentance be discerned? Does true repentance mean that we suddenly become like Jesus? Why is repentance so important in order to become more like Jesus? What is the benefit of repentance according to Acts 3:19? Unfortunately, I believe too many people accept Jesus without true repentance. Therefore they continue to struggle with many issues in their life. Do you agree?

 - 2. Identify with Christ's death and resurrection – The apostle Paul exhorts believers to see that those who have truly put their faith in Jesus Christ have died and

risen with him (Romans 6:1-14). Until we see that sin no longer needs to have mastery over us (verse 9), the sin nature will continue to dominate our life. "WE ARE CRUCIFIED WITH HIM SO THAT THE BODY OF SIN WILL BE DONE AWAY WITH" (verse 6). This is the Good News of the Gospel! In all respect, dead people don't react because they're dead. You can say and do whatever you desire to a dead person, and they won't react. Why? THERE'RE DEAD! When we identify with the death of Jesus, our old nature is done away with. We don't react! The reason so many Christians still react in negative and shameful ways is because they haven't considered themselves DEAD to sin and ALIVE to Christ! (Galatians 2:20-21).

3. Be filled with the Holy Spirit – The house that is swept clean of the old life must be filled with the Holy Spirit. It's the Holy Spirit that gives us the power to grow in the likeness of Jesus (Romans 8:1-11; II Corinthians 3:17-18; Ephesians 5:18). Growing in the likeness of Jesus will be reflected in the "fruit of the Spirit." When we live by the Spirit the old ugly ways of the past life won't stand a chance to resurrect (Galatians 5:16-17).

D. Having these three spiritual foundations in our life should motivate us to be led by the Holy Spirit to:

1. Express genuine repentance, not only when we are saved, but on a moment by moment and daily basis. Daily repentance is a genuine guarantee for spiritual growth and growing in the likeness of Jesus.
2. Identify with Christ's death and resurrection on a daily basis. Old habit patterns and the carnal nature do not have to harass us until we reach the grave. It's time to die. In dying we live!
3. Be filled with the Holy Spirit on a daily basis. Every day we will open our hearts to a fresh touch of God's spirit which will enable us to demonstrate the character of Jesus.

E. Summary

Kingdom life is radically different than natural life. By daily repentance and death to the old life, we open our heart to the filling of the Holy Spirit which enables us to grow in the likeness of Jesus.

F. Action steps: (James 1:22-25)

Do I daily manifest a spirit of repentance and death to self? In what areas does the self life still raise its ugly head? Am I willing to work at these foundational issues in my life? If so, what are the next steps?

LESSON NINE

HOW STRONG IS MY FOUNDATION? – Part 2

From chaos to peace:

As a young house wife with two small children, Kendra found herself frazzled every day with the cares of life. Her two children, a boy and a girl, were two and three. They both were hyperactive and demanded a lot of attention. Kendra was married. Her husband Joe worked long hours, often not getting home until late. When he did arrive home he was tired, hungry, and wanted some time alone. Kendra didn't find much consolation in her marriage.

Kendra was a professing Christian and active in the church. However she felt like her patience was as thin as a sheet of tissue paper. More and more she was quick tempered with the children, her husband, and even with some friends from church. She tried to read her Bible and pray, but it all seemed futile.

One day when the babies were screaming, she screamed, and threw herself across the bed. Tears flowed, and with clenched fists she cried out, "God, I can't take this any longer." Strangely, a surge of peace came over her being. She sensed the Lord whispering in her ear, "I was waiting for you to give up." She realized the children stopped screaming. Peace was present in the house.

Kendra began to discover that she can't be like Jesus in her own strength. She tried so hard. In the coming days and weeks during the free moments she did have from child care and household duties, she turned off the TV and the radio and began to search the Scriptures regarding God's grace and surrender of the will. Her husband Joe noticed a change and soon he began to experience a transformation. They began to pray together and pray over the children when they were sleeping and awake. It wasn't instant, but revival came to Kendra and Joe's home. A house of confusion was gradually transformed into a home of peace.

What was the key to the turnaround in Kendra and Joe's home?

- A. Key verse** – Hebrews 4:14-16 – Like Kendra, we all come to those times in our life where we feel so hopeless. The writer to the Hebrews didn't mean for us to only come to him when we feel an emergency situation. The door is always open. However, sometimes our current crisis looms so big and thank God for the "throne of grace." What does the "throne of grace" mean to you?

- B. Key thought** – Absolute surrender to Jesus as Lord, admitting we can't do things in our own strength, provides the open door for God to begin to work and release His grace into our life. God knows everything about us but he likes when we are honest with him. David did this over and over again in the Psalms (Psalms 3:4; 18:6). Believing that God will help takes faith. Surrender, grace, and faith are all important for developing a foundation to grow in the likeness of Jesus.

- C. Foundational principles for growing in the likeness of Jesus (continued)**
 - 1. Absolute surrender – In Lesson 7, this point was briefly touched on as it related to the life of Jesus, a character quality that we want to reflect. Absolute surrender should not only be daily reflected in our life but it is also a foundational principle.

When Jesus surrendered his will regarding the cross, it gave him the strength to face the cross (Matthew 26:39). Absolute surrender puts us in a place where we are no longer in control, just like when an army surrenders. We fight against surrendering because we want control of our situation. Paul says in Philippians 2:13, *“for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to HIS good purpose.”* The act of surrender allows God to help us in whatever situation we find ourselves. The will, our center of emotions is powerful. When we humbly submit our will to the Lord, we will begin to grow in the likeness of Jesus. Why?

2. Receiving & living by God’s Grace – Grace is God’s power that enables to grow in the likeness of Jesus. Without oil, an engine burns out. Without allowing God’s grace to freely work in our life, we burn out. We have numerous promises of God’s abundant provision of grace that has been poured out to us: (John 1:16; Romans 5:1-2, 17; Ephesians 1:5-9). Why is it hard for people to live by grace?
3. Live by faith and not by sight – It requires faith to surrender everything into the hands of God. It requires faith to believe that God will give grace for every situation. It requires faith to believe that my life will be an ever-increasing reflection of the glory of God. When Jesus ministered to people, faith was required for transformation (Mark 5:34; Luke 7:50 and numerous other references). Paul gives numerous exhortations regarding faith: (I Corinthians 16:13; II Corinthians 5:7; Ephesians 6:16; I Timothy 1:18-19). Faith will move us to action (James 2:14-20)

D. Having these three spiritual foundations in our life should motivate us to be led by the Holy Spirit to:

1. Surrender our total being to the Lord so that He can work in our lives to transform us and cause us to grow in the likeness of Jesus.
2. Receive God’s full provision of grace. Without God’s grace actively working in our lives, we resort to self effort and cannot grow in the likeness of Jesus.
3. Live by faith and not by what we see with our eyes. Faith enables us to trust God’s power to help us face every situation with the mind of Jesus.

E. Summary

The foundation of absolute surrender, receiving and living by God’s grace, and the daily exercise of faith are crucial for our spiritual life if we are to grow in the likeness of Jesus.

F. Action steps: (James 1:22-25)

Are there areas of my life that I find it hard to surrender to the Lord? Why or why not? What is one or two specific things that God is asking me to surrender so that I can grow more fully in to the likeness of Jesus? On a scale of 1 to 10, how are grace and faith working in my life? How can grace and faith increase in my life?

LESSON TEN

BENFITS AND BLESSINGS OF GROWING IN THE LIKENESS OF JESUS

From painful prison to godly passion:

Charlie loved to minister in the name of Jesus. His heart was right, his message was anointed, and he enjoyed a fruitful ministry. His primary focus was a ministry to ex-offenders and those in bondage to various addictions. For thirty years of his life, Charlie lived a miserable life. His addictions separated him from family, friends, and ultimately he served time in prison related to the fruit of his addictions.

One day a brother named Jessie visited Charlie in prison and introduced him to Jesus. In desperation, Charlie responded to the Gospel and God honored his child-like faith. He began to study the Word of God, get involved in church activities, and after prison had the privilege to attend a Bible School. Charlie was a new man in Christ!

Jessie prayed that Charlie would have a growing hunger for God. And that he did. Instead of wasting countless hours watching TV, Charlie began to consume the Word of God and the Word consumed him. No matter what his past was, Charlie fully received the grace of God, surrendered his entire will to God and lived by faith. Even hardened men would respect Charlie and many longed for what he had. They just weren't ready to surrender.

As Charlie's fellowship with the Lord deepened, his ministry grew, his anointing increased, and fruitfulness abounded. As he had learned to depend fully on God's grace, he gave all glory back to the one, Jesus, who had redeemed him. Because he had learned to grow in the likeness of Jesus, these blessing, not without trials at times, were the daily experience of his life. Charlie knew the pain of prison but had an ever growing passion for the Lord.

What was the secret of Charlie's overflowing life?

- A. Key verse** – Acts 4:32-33 – The early church was in great unity, there was a spirit of sharing, and the Bible says *“much grace was upon them all.”* We see in Acts 2:42 there was a devotion to the Apostles teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayer. God was in their midst. In a relative short period of time they manifested a Christ-like life. Satan would try to deceive us into thinking that growing into the likeness of Jesus will take years. That's a lie.
- B. Key thought** – There are many benefits and blessings when we pursue the call to grow into the likeness of Jesus. When we allow Jesus and not self to be the ruler of our life, we'll be amazed at the fruitfulness that Christ will produce in us.
- C. Benefits and blessings of growing in the likeness of Jesus**
 - 1. Godly Christ-like Kingdom character demonstrated to the world - The world will have a true representation of Christ and true Christianity, a fuller manifestation of the Kingdom of God. When the Kingdom of God becomes visible and active under the authority of Jesus, the powers of darkness will be pushed back. This

reality was demonstrated in Ephesus (Acts 19). A clear testimony will overcome the powers of darkness!

2. Genuine peace and contentment in one's life and relationships – Living an absolutely surrendered life to the Lord, demonstrating Christ-likeness in every sphere of life, will bring peace and contentment (Psalm 119:165; Hebrews 13:10; Philippians 4:7-9; I John 1:7). How will growing in the likeness of Jesus bring genuine peace into relationships?
3. Spiritual victories and breakthroughs – Satan always works where there is darkness. If we walk in the light of God and are growing in the likeness of Jesus, we'll experience breakthroughs in the darkest of times (Acts 16:16-40). How can growing in the likeness of Jesus produce spiritual breakthroughs in our everyday life?
4. Anointing and blessing of the Holy Spirit – God honors lives that manifest integrity and Christ-likeness (I Corinthians 16:15-18; I Corinthians 2:1-5). Is it possible to have anointing without godly character? Why or why not?
5. Intimate relationship with the Lord – Having an intimate relationship with the Lord is a key foundational principle for growing in the likeness of Jesus. However, as we grow in intimacy with the Father, we also become more like Jesus. Why is this true? Read John 15:1-17. Why is “abiding/remaining in the Vine” important for growing in the likeness of Jesus?

D. Experiencing these benefits and blessings of growing in the likeness of Jesus will motivate us to:

1. An ever-deepening walk with the Lord until one day we see Him face to face and hear Jesus say, *“Well done, good and faithful servant, enter now into the joys of the Lord.”*
2. A stronger conviction to have others to come and realize the joy of knowing Jesus—a renewed vision for evangelism.
3. A passion to see God's Kingdom established in the earth in an ever increasing way.

E. Summary:

There is a great blessing to be enjoyed when we grow in the likeness of Jesus. This blessing overflows and affects not only our life but those around us for the glory of God.

F. Action steps: (James 1:22-25)

What fruit do I see in my life as a result of growing in the likeness of Jesus? What fruit do I long to yet see? Am I willing to pay the price of surrender and commitment? What is my next step to fulfilling God's vision for my life?

GROWING IN THE LIKENESS OF JESUS SUMMARY CONCLUSION

1. The Kingdom of God is simply the rule of God. God's kingdom is hindered in its advancement because many Christians are still allowing self to rule their lives.
2. Many people who are not living under Kingdom authority become an open door for Satan to deceive. Their actions do not line up with their statements of commitment.
3. When believers get a fuller revelation of the relationship between growing in the likeness of Jesus and the Kingdom of God, we will experience a greater impact for Christ in our lives, homes, marriages, congregations, communities, and nations.
4. Jesus, Paul, and others taught, preached, demonstrated, and proclaimed the Kingdom of God. This Kingdom supersedes all other kingdoms and it's important to remember that our first allegiance is to the Kingdom of God.
5. God has an eternal destiny for every believer to grow in the likeness of Jesus. Satan will do everything in his power to defeat our destiny. By God's grace we can fulfill our destiny to grow in the likeness of Jesus.
6. When we look at the life of Jesus, we see the Divine qualities we are to reflect: love; compassion; truth; prayer; forgiveness; servant heart; humility; ministry of healing and deliverance; care for the poor; complete surrender; and much more.
7. When we look at all these qualities in Jesus we're tempted to say, "How is it possible to live a Christ-like life?" But when we have the right foundations it's possible. Jesus is the chief foundation, but foundational principles include the following: genuine repentance; identity with Jesus death and resurrection; being full of the Holy Spirit; absolute surrender; receiving and living by God's grace; living by faith and not by sight.
8. In the end, there are many benefits to growing in the likeness of Jesus. They include: Godly Christ-like character demonstrated to the world; genuine peace and contentment in one's life; spiritual victories and breakthroughs; anointing and blessing of the Holy Spirit; intimate relationship with the Father.

The study points and associated Scriptures are far from exhaustive on this subject. Hopefully this will challenge you to a deeper study and fuller revelation of what it means to grow in the likeness of Jesus. As each of us walk in obedience to this high calling and destiny, we will be an answer to the cry of Jesus many years ago, *"Your Kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven."*

Remember James 1:22-25. Let's not only be hearers of the Word of God but let's put this Word into action in our respective lives. May God receive all the glory!