

Faith – Study 1

Hebrews 11:1-2

- Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see
- What is not said here is what it is that we should be hoping for that we do not see
- What do you think faith is?

Romans 4:18-22

- What, according to verse 21 is the faith Abraham demonstrated?
- Abraham was credited as righteous because he had faith that what God promised was true?
- We can rightly only have faith in the things that God tells us that we can have faith in

Romans 10:17

- Faith comes from hearing the Word of God
- This enforces the fact that we can only rightly have faith in the things that God has stated or promised in the Word of God

James 2:14-24

- Faith is more than just mental agreement; it is acting on what we believe
- Faith is believing in God's word and His promises but also acting as though they are true
- To have true faith, we must "do"
- Faith is action induced by belief and gratitude
- It is not continuing to operate from a worldly point of view, thinking that I earn my status because faith is completely reliant upon God

1 Thessalonians 1:3/ 2 Thessalonians 1:11

- What prompts faith?
- What does faith prompt us to do?

Matthew 9:1-2

- What does this verse teach us about faith?
- The believed in Jesus but they also took action on that belief?

Matthew 13:53-58

- Their lack of faith kept the people of Jesus' hometown from experiencing the power of God
- If we don't believe in God's word or don't act on that belief (which is the same thing in essence), then we keep the power of God from working in our life
- God will not force Himself upon us
- Genuine faith is the means through which we open ourselves up to the power of God's Word

1 Corinthians 2:4-5

- Our faith must rest on God's power and God's word

2 Corinthians 5:7

- Paul is referring directly to faith in the hope of future resurrection for believers but the truth is that Christians are people who live according to faith
- This means that we are people who act on God's Word rather than what we see

- We act on God's Word because it is God's Word regardless of how impractical or crazy it might sound

Galatians 3:26

- We enter into this life of faith by faith in the life of Christ
- Dying to ourselves and being baptized into Christ is a declaration that we are going to join the people that live by faith

Ephesians 3:10-12

- We develop our relationship with God and our continue in the community of Christ, the church, often times through faith in what God said rather than what we see or feel

Ephesians 6:16

- Faith often times does not make sense but it draws us into our relationship with God and protects us from the attacks of Satan
- Faith protects us not because it always makes sense but because we take action in doing what God told us to do

James 1:2-3

- When things don't go immediately as we might wish or we don't see things going well, it can challenge us to persevere in our faith
- These times of testing our faith, however, produce the perseverance that we will need down the road

Hebrews 10:38-39

- The righteous will live by faith in the life of Christ
- We will live by faith and not shrink back regardless of what our sight or feelings might tell us
- As we continue on our journey of discipleship, it will demand us to walk by faith and believe the things that the Word of God says to be true

Knowing God – Study 2

Jeremiah 9:23-24

- What does God want from his people?
- A boast in the ancient world was something in which you trusted to bring you identity. How does this help us understand what these verses are saying?

Jeremiah 31:31-34 (Hebrews 8:11)

- God promised that a New Covenant would come with an identifying characteristic that his people would know him intimately
- God wants us to go beyond just following rules and being religious to know him personally in a relationship

What are some ways that we can know God?

Through His word

- Matthew 4:4
 - o We Can know God through his word by completely relying on as the source of our thoughts, beliefs, actions, and direction
- Romans 16:25-26
 - o We can come to a personal knowledge of God through his word which enables us to obey him
 - o We obey God because of our relationship with him
 - o We want to move past just obeying God without knowing why or without knowing him – that is religion
 - o God wants us to have a relationship not religion
 - o The fact is that Religion with relationship will eventually lead to rebellion

Through Jesus

- John 10:2-5; 14
 - o If a stranger walked in and claimed to be your best friend, you would know better because you know your friend
 - o In the same way, we should get to know Jesus so well that we immediately know his voice whether it comes through his word or another person
- John 14:7
 - o As we come to know Jesus through our relationship with him, we will also know the Father

Through Prayer

- Philippians 4:6-7
 - o We can take all kinds of petitions and requests to God in prayer
 - o As we pray and be open with God, he will reveal himself and his nature to us
 - o We should not be discouraged that this is a process that takes time – it takes time to truly get to know anyone and God is no different
 - o We can know and trust him immediately on some levels, but it will take time to truly learn to know God and make ourselves known at the deepest levels
- Matthew 6:9-13
 - o As we pray with consistency and effort we will learn
 - Our relationship to God as our Father and how incredible he is (v. 9)
 - To value the rule and reign of his kingdom and gain the desire to know and carry out his will rather than our own (v. 10)
 - That we need to rely on him every day for our every need (v. 11)
 - That we need to become like him and take on his nature and character in every part of our lives (v. 12)
 - To rely on him to keep us secure in the life of Christ (v. 13)
 - o When we get to know someone at all those levels then we can truly have a deep relationship with them
- John 15:7

- When we walk with God and remain in Christ's life and his will then we will get to a point where whatever we ask will be given to us because our will is in lock-step with his will
- That is true relationship with God

Through his people

- a. John 13
- Matthew 25:34-46
 - When we are in a restored relationship with God, we realize that what is true for Christ is true for his people
 - The way we treat, think about, and develop intimate relationships with other disciples bears a direct correlation to our relationship with God
- 1 John 4:20-21
 - The way we love other believers and know them in relationship is a sure indicator of how we love God and the kind of relationship we have with him

By stepping out in faith

- One way that we can know God that is often overlooked is to experience him. Great athletes are known to be such because someone trusted them to perform and they came through time and time again. In the same way, we can get to know God at a certain level only when we step out in faith and give him the opportunity to provide for us and show himself to be faithful. When we see God work in answer to our faith we learn to trust him and know him intimately. The Bible is full of examples of people stepping out in faith in response to God and learning to know him. Here are just a few:
- Genesis 22:10
 - Exodus 18:10-11
 - 1 Kings 17:7-24
 - 2 Kings 5:1-15
 - Acts 12:5-11
 - Romans 4:17-21
- 2 Timothy 1:12
 - Paul knew and trusted God intimately because he had experienced him

Prayer – Study 3

Hebrews 10:19-23

- Because we are in Christ, we can approach God in confidence and know that we stand in his presence when we pray
- At its core, prayer is the time when we plug into God's reality and begin to align our spirits with God's will
- Prayer is not primarily about moving God to meet our will, but moving ourselves to get into sync with God's will

James 5:16

- The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective
- Prayer moves God to action
- Prayer aligns us with the will of God

What does the Bible actually say about prayer? Who should we pray to?

Luke 6:12 (Mark 1:35)

- Jesus prayed to the Father
- He prayed sacrificially (throughout the night)

Hebrews 5:7

- Jesus prayed to the Father fervently and in submission
- Part of the point of his prayer was to learn to do the will of the Father (Luke 22:42)

John 14:13-14 (Acts 7:59)

- The early church also believed that praying to Jesus was appropriate as he is also God (we can infer from that that praying to the Holy Spirit is also acceptable)

Philippians 4:6-7

- What, according, to God can we pray about?
- There is nothing too small to take to God in prayer as long as it is consistent with His will and His Kingdom

1 Peter 3:12

- Whether we realize it or not, God hears our prayers
- He does care

How should we pray?

Luke 5:16

- Jesus prayed often and in isolation
- Jesus put himself in situations where he could focus on God

Acts 12:5, 12

- The people of God pray together
- They were praying to move God

Mark 11:25-26

- Pray with a heart of forgiveness
- We need to forgive because God forgave but also so that He will continue to forgive us

1 Timothy 2:8

- We pray to God, with other people but not to impress other people
- Without anger or disputing, which he implies that there will be opportunity for anger or disputing

Matthew 21:21-22

- Prayer demands faith
- We must also pray according to God's will, that's what Jesus means by whatever you ask

John 9:31

- Who does God listen to?
- Praying involves praying about and doing God's will

Luke 18:9-14

- What attitude does God want us to have as we approach prayer?
- Those who exalt will be humbled
- Those who humble themselves will be exalted

1 Corinthians 14:15

- What are the two things that we should pray with?
- What does it mean to pray with our spirit?
- What does it mean to pray with our mind?

Romans 8:26

- We don't often know what to pray for but the Spirit will guide us if we ask and allow Him to
- We may not understand how He does it, but He will guide us

Matthew 6:5-13

- He doesn't mean that you can't pray with other people
- This refers to the attitude with which you pray
- We pray with humility and servitude rather than for a show or to exalt ourselves
- Avoid mindless, repetitive prayer
- Prayer is a humble dialogue with our God, it's incantations, chants, or a magical spell to induce to action
- We pray to praise God
- Praying is learning to God's will and pray for God's will to be done

Prayer Model

Adoration (see Psalm 18)

Confession (see Psalm 51)

Thanksgiving (Psalm 136)

Supplication (asking God to supply our daily bread and enable us to do His will) (see Psalm 23)

Battling Temptation – Study 4

Ephesians 6:10-18

- We will all fight a spiritual battle and we need to fight with the proper tools
- Knowledge and its proper use wins battles (Hosea 4:6)
- We can know about God and not use the knowledge properly
- Our thought life is the only place Satan can gain access to our spirits
- Satan's primary fiery darts are thoughts, ideas, concepts and suggestions (T.I.C.S.)
- Every action I have ever taken is a result of T.I.C.S.
- We must know the terrain on which we are fighting; the spiritual battle is primarily a mental battle

1 Peter 5:8

- Satan is looking for someone to devour
- We open ourselves to him when we don't control our thought life

Isaiah 14:12-15

- Not controlling our thought life leads to destructive thoughts and behavior
- Satan attempts to trip us up in the same way that we see here
- "Sow a thought, reap an action"
- "Sow an action, reap a habit"
- "Sow a habit, and reap a character"
- "Sow a character, and reap a destiny" but it all begins with a thought

2 Corinthians 11:3

- How was Eve led astray
- Every stupid thing we have done in our life goes back to T.I.C.S. that we acted on
- It is impossible to sin without first thinking wrongly about God
- If we don't control our thought life, we will be devoured

2 Corinthians 4:4

- Satan has blinded the minds of humans through T.I.C.S.
- It's a viscous circle because they don't realize they are under Satan's control because they are blinded, so they don't know they're blind

Ephesians 4:22-24

- Satan deceives us through T.I.C.S.
- To be Christ-like involves controlling our thought life – We become enemies to God when we don't control our thought life (Colossians 1:21)
- Jesus tells us in Matthew that sins of the mind are just as serious as sins of action
- The process of dying to self and putting on the life of Christ has much to do with changing the way we think

2 Corinthians 10:4-5

- Take every thought captive
- We have to measure (like a ruler) every thought with the Word
- We can't keep thoughts from coming, they will come all the time but we can keep them from nesting
- We have to be careful and examine every thought because these ideas sound just like us in our head. If we knew it was Satan it wouldn't be very tempting.
- Most thoughts make sense, they're rational. If they were totally negative we would realize it right away
- Right intentions will have wrong outcome without proper instructions
- Most of us go to great lengths to protect ourselves from toxins and viruses, we lock our doors to protect our belongings and yet we naively assume they can expose our minds to anything we desire without it having any effect whatsoever on our thought life (TV, movies, music, friends, books, etc)

- It's better to think about something and discard inappropriate thoughts before you act than to have to think about how to clean up your mess

1 Peter 1:13

- We have to prepare our minds for action
- Not controlling our thoughts the moment they come into our mind and rather fighting temptation at the point of action is like giving an opposing team the ball on our one-yard line every play and trying to keep them out of the end zone
- If we always fight at the point of action rather than dealing right away with the thought, we will fail more often than not

Romans 12:2

- We have to transform and control our minds
- Then we will be able to test and see what is from God
- It takes only a minute to convert the soul, but a lifetime to convert the mind

Philippians 4:8

- Before I should think on anything they should meet the standard of these 8 things
 - o Something could be true but not noble or lovely, etc.
- Keeping our minds focused is a full-time and difficult job
 - o Seven ways to keep our thoughts focused on these 8 standards
 - Read It - *Our minds will never be more holy than our knowledge of the Scripture will allow*
 - Memorize It
 - Use It
 - Watch and pray – Prayer should be more an inoculation than an antibiotic
 - Substitute one thought for another – Overcome evil with good (Romans 12:21)
 - We don't get rid of evil thoughts by telling ourselves not to think about it (try not thinking of a red elephant)
 - Be honest – About what we're thinking, why we're thinking it, and the reality of obtaining it
 - Confess our thoughts to one another not just our actions
- *Every sinful action signifies a spiritual battle in the mind that was fought and lost*
- *Fight the good fight; but fight it on the right battlefield so that victory is possible*

Reading the Bible – Study 5

Mark 4:1-20

- This passage describes the differing responses to the Word of God that came through Jesus' ministry but it parallels our response to the Word of God found in the Bible
- Discuss the differing responses to the Word and what those responses can look like in our day
- What two things happen to those who hear the Word as good soil?
- What does it mean to accept the Word (John 8:31)?
- What does it mean to produce a crop (Galatians 5:22-26)

Mark 4:24-25

- Jesus here is still referring to the way that people respond to the Word of God
- Those who embrace, dig for, and go after knowing, learning, and practicing the Word of God will be allowed to go deeper, understand more, and produce the fruit of the Spirit
- Those who ignore the Word or treat it with malaise or laziness will open themselves up to serious spiritual dangers of many types

Mark 7:1-13

- Jesus was not against traditions but was very critical of traditions that went against or circumvented the Word of God
- Why are traditions so appealing? Why are they so dangerous?

Luke 16:19-31

- Jesus believed that the Word of God (Moses and the prophets) was absolutely the most powerful tool available to convert people to obedience to God
- He believed that the Word was more effective and powerful than someone coming back from the dead
- Conversion through the Word is more than just a one-time event – it continues throughout our lives as we are conformed to the image of Christ
- It is easy to begin to think that other things like the opinion of others or our own effort will be more effective in our lives than the Word of God but that is not Jesus' view
- Faith comes only from hearing the Word of God and nothing else (Romans 10:17)

Acts 17:10-12

- The Bereans listened to the preaching of Paul but they went to the Scriptures constantly to verify his words
- It is never a good idea to get so comfortable with any teacher that we don't measure their words against the Word of God – even the best teachers in our time make an occasional mistake
- In order to be aware of poor, shallow, or improper teaching, each disciples must have their own knowledge of the Word of God which they constantly seek to improve

1 Thessalonians 2:13

- They accepted the Word of God as being the Word of God rather than a human word. What is the difference?
- What does Paul mean by saying that the Word is at work in them?
- Paul stresses the same two benefits of those who hear the Word: They will accept it and it will produce a crop in them

Hebrews 4:12-13

- The Word of God is pertinent to every day life
- It is the tool that God will use to produce a crop of the fruit of the Spirit in our lives

2 Timothy 2:15

- Paul encouraged Timothy to be a student of the Word of God – we should do no less

- This doesn't mean that we approach the Word in a strictly academic fashion
- Knowing the Word and growing in our understanding of it does take time, effort and discipline though
- What is the implication to the ability to handle the Word for those who are not workers

1 Peter 3:15

- We cannot know the answer to every possible question about the Word of God but there does need to be an effort to constantly learn from it and grow in our understanding
- If we go back to verse 8, we see that the context of this verse is in having compassion and sympathy for others
- We certainly need to study and read the Bible for our own personal growth but we do need to go beyond that
- One element of our study should be to have knowledge to help others in their knowledge of God and His Word

2 Timothy 3:16-17

- All Scripture is useful for what four things
- Teaching implies that we need to learn from the Word of God and let it change our mind
- Rebuking means that it gives us firm convictions and shows us what to believe
- Correcting means that we let the Word of God change our behaviors and thoughts – reading God's Word is not just a mental effort
- Training in righteousness means that the Word teaches us how to stand in the right place before God, which means that as we obey the Word it will produce a crop of the righteous fruit of the Spirit and transform us into the image of God

James 1:22-25

- We can't just read or appreciate the word of God; we must put it into action in our lives

One Another Relationships – Study 6

John 13:34-35

- The defining mark of God's people are the way we actively love one another
- It's not about what we say or how we "feel" about God but how we act towards one another

Romans 12:1-16

- We are called to be living sacrifices, which denotes a constant choice to remain a sacrifice
- Paul connects the idea of being a living sacrifice with belonging to one another in the fellowship and being devoted to one another
- We should have a modest opinion of ourselves and be willing to serve in any capacity

Romans 13:8

- We have a debt to love one another
- We fulfill the law of Christ by loving one another

Romans 14:13-19

- It's easy to pass judgment on one another, but we are called to avoid that type of attitude
- Peace and building one another up should always trump the freedom that we have if the two come in conflict
- A right is something that does not restrict someone else

Romans 15:1-7

- All of our interactions should be with the best interests of others in mind
- Christ was our example and our continuing motivation to accept one another in this way

Galatians 5:13-15

- We are called to serve one another in love rather than indulging our own interests
- We don't have to worry about a bunch of rules or laws if we simply commit to loving one another

1 Corinthians 12:25-26

- A true body is connected
- If one part of the body is out of whack, it affects the whole body
- What we do, even if it means not being present, affects the entire body

Colossians 3:12-14

- There is an assumption and a reality that we will have opportunities to have grievances towards one another (Hebrews 12:14-15)
- We forgive one another in the same way that Christ forgave us

Hebrews 10:23-25

- Part of holding unswervingly to the faith is to encourage one another daily
- Encourage means to build each other up to stand strong in our convictions
- Why does the writer encourage the Christians to not give up meeting together?

James 5:16

- Part of loving and trusting one another is to be real with each other
- Confession to one another is an important part of the Christian community

Galatians 2:11-14

- Part of being real with one another is to confront sin that we see in one another's life
- This should always be done with grace, love, and humility but needs to be done in order to truly love one another

- To not confront sin that we see in a loving way is to act according to the patterns of the world
- We must be careful to distinguish between true sin and things that just bother us or differ from our opinion

1 Peter 4:9-10

- We should constantly look for ways to be hospitable towards and give to one another
- God gives us gifts and abilities so that His grace can be poured out into the body through our gifts
- To not use our gifts would be to deny God's grace to the rest of the body

Philemon 1:6

- To fully understand all that we have in Christ, we must share our faith with our partners in the gospel, our fellow Christians

Forgiveness – Study 7

2 Chronicles 7:14

- God has always set an example of forgiveness
- Forgiving is a virtue because God forgives and calls His people to forgive

Matthew 6:9-15

- A large part of God's will is forgiveness
- He has offered forgiveness to the world and His will is for His people to demonstrate that forgiveness

Matthew 18:15-17

- This passage is directly addressed to situations in which we are personally sinned against
- First, we are to talk to others, which often times means putting their interests ahead of our own because confronting someone can be extremely uncomfortable
- This should always be done with an attitude of love (see Col. 3:14 below)
- If the person does not listen, sit down in love with others, again for the benefit of helping the one who has sinned
- If they still do not repent then the matter should be brought before the Church

Matthew 18:21-35

- How many times are we called to forgive someone who seeks repentance?
- The parable that Jesus gives offers the reason for living as people that demonstrate this kind of forgiveness
- The sins that others perpetrate against us, could never match up to the severity of our debts and sin against God

Ephesians 4:31-32; Luke 17:3-4

- We are to get rid of anger, rage, bitterness, etc.
- That is our responsibility
- We are to forgive those who repent; Only when someone repents can they be forgiven (this is true whether it is us or God doing the forgiving)
- If someone doesn't repent that doesn't mean we hang on to our anger or bitterness; We are still to release that waiting for the time when they repent and we can forgive them
- It is important to note that forgiveness doesn't mean acting like something never happened or removing the consequences of their sin but it means we don't continue to judge a person based on past behavior of which they have repented
- An example here might be necessary: If someone stole money in a situation where they were trusted and repents from it; they can be forgiven and should no longer be judged or looked down upon for their past action, yet as a consequence of their past sin, they should probably not be put in a similar position of trust and access to money for wise amount of time

Mark 11:25-26

- We forgive others so that the reality of stepping into God's presence and connecting with His will through prayer is not interrupted
- If we are not living a life of forgiveness then we step out of God's reality and His forgiveness

Colossians 3:12-14

- We forgive because it is part of the life of Christ that we have put on when we died to self
- We have a portion of that life because Christ forgave us

- If we refuse to forgive, we demonstrate that we haven't really entered into His reality

Matthew 26:27-28

- When we forgive others we announce to the world the ministry of reconciliation and forgiveness that God has made available to everyone

Mark 2:5-7

- Only God can forgive sins
- We don't forgive sins because sins are against God; we forgive what has been done to us
- What we do is offer forgiveness that points to the forgiveness that God offers

2 Corinthians 2:5-11

- Paul gives a wonderful demonstration of the attitude of forgiveness in action
- He had been wronged but is far more concerned with the good of the Corinthian community from which the offender came and with the offender himself
- Notice Paul has personally forgiven to such an extent that he's not even sure if he ever had anything to forgive

Ephesians 4:1-3

- Forgiving and living in unity is an intentional act
- It's something that takes effort, forethought, and the will to continue to live a life of forgiveness

Acts 9:26-28

- Forgiveness in action
- Less than three years before this Paul had been a persecutor of the church and had Stephen, a beloved brother in the Jerusalem church killed
- Despite all that, the Jerusalem church accepted and forgave
- A forgiving God has a forgiving family

Led by the Spirit – Study 8

Isaiah 55:8

- We do not think like God
- Our minds, if left to themselves, will work and think like the world
- The biblical call for us to walk according to the Spirit demands that we change the way we think and believe

Romans 6:16

- Learning to walk in the Spirit involves obeying God's Word (obedience) and overcoming through prayer
- This life goes against our fleshly desires
- Our free-will obedience is credited as a step toward righteousness

Psalms 37:4

- God will give us new desires in our hearts once we allowed Him to change it
- The "new you" is the "real you" – the one with the Spirit inside, free of the mandates of our feelings.

Romans 1:18-32

- What we allow to influence us (*where we place our trust/security*) determines the consequences. The life in "the flesh" creates a vicious cycle of sin that must be broken.
- A life marred by sin will lead to distorted thinking which leads to more sin which leads to more distorted thinking – It is a vicious cycle of sin that must be broken by responding to the power of the Spirit (2 Cor. 4:4 says that Satan blinds the minds of those in the world)

Romans 7:18

- Our sinful nature, flesh keeps us from being able to please God and do His will

Romans 7:14-25

- Paul uses the hypothetical "I" of a people that are still under the law to demonstrate that all the Old Testament law could do was show our inability to meet God's standards
- It could not rescue us from the flesh but just highlighted how far from God our flesh is

Romans 8:5-17

- In Christ, we are able to do something that no human can do on their own, walk according to the Spirit and be led by the Spirit
- To do this, though, we must have our mind set from the beginning on becoming like Christ rather than what our sinful flesh desires
- Trying to be led by the Spirit while seeking the fundamental desires of the flesh is like running into a brick wall
- We have to shed the desires of the flesh like being happy, comfortable, respected, etc. and seek the things of the Spirit like being like Christ
- Only then will we be able to be led by the Spirit

Ephesians 4:17-32

- The goal of the life in Christ is to allow the Spirit to direct us in putting off the old life, our own life, and to put on the life of Christ
- Paul gives numerous examples of how we are to not only put off the old behavior but replace it with the new behavior, led by the Spirit in the life of Christ

Romans 12:1-2

- One of the fundamental aspects to being led by the Spirit and embracing the life of Christ is to realize that we have to change the way we think about everything

Ephesians 5:18

- Another way to word is: “Don’t allow yourself to be animated/influenced by alcohol, which when yielded to reap the fruits of the flesh. Instead allow yourself to be animated/influence by the Spirit” [and so yield the fruit of the Spirit].
- Simple “cause and effect” teaching
- When someone is drunk the whole person is drunk – nothing works right. In the same way, Christianity is not simply “moral reform.” (outside or visual) - it is an entire transformation (inside or spiritual). The ability to be transformed is given by the Holy Spirit and affects everything: behavior, attitude & outlook, worldview, where one place your hope & security, and what captures one’s passion.

John 15:1-17

- We must remain in Christ to bear the fruit of the Spirit in keeping God’s covenant and pleasing God
- To do this we must change the way we think
- Jesus also says that one of the primary means of doing this is through loving one another

The Life of a Servant – Study 9

Matthew 20:25-28

- Jesus came to the earth to serve. As we enter into the life of Christ, we enter into the life of a servant
- The Christian attitude towards authority, status, and service are quite different from the world around us

Philippians 2:3-8

- The world tells us to do whatever it takes to meet our own needs and to think of ourselves first
- Jesus calls us to imitate Him and consider other's interests first
- When we humble ourselves and consider others, we are able to see ways to serve

Mark 10:45

- Christ's life was characterized by service
- He serves as the ultimate example of what we are becoming and aspire to

John 13:1-7, 14-15

- John tells us that because Jesus had all power and authority and was God in his very nature that he acted as a servant – a servant is, in other words, the very nature of God that Jesus was revealing and calling his disciples to emulate

Luke 17:7-10

- When we have served, our attitude should be that we have only done our duty with no expectation of reward or recognition
- Like Jesus, a servant is what we are rather than what we do; If service is what we do it is easy to expect praise or get prideful about what we
- Instead being a servant is just who we are to be and we don't really expect praise or get prideful about being who we are

Romans 12:1-8

- In worship to God, we offer ourselves as living sacrifices. Put off our old way of thinking – self-seeking, pleasure-seeking, independent, self-important, etc.
- Instead, put on Christ's thoughts – how can I use the gift(s) God has given me to serve the Church and others?
- Part of our spiritual act of worship is that we serve and belong to one another as the body of Christ

Ephesians 6:7-8

- Serve with all our hearts as though we are serving God, not the actual person or people we are serving
- We should serve without expecting anything in return; our reward will be from God
- Our service to others is based on our commitment to God not on whether that person has "deserved" it or not

Galatians 5:13-14

- In Christ we are free! God wants us to use our freedom not to serve ourselves, but others
- Paul reminds us of Jesus command to love our neighbor as ourselves
- As we love others we would love ourselves, God will open our eyes to the needs of others and the ways we can serve them.

John 15:9-17

- The way that we fulfill Jesus' commands is through self-sacrificial love for others

2 Corinthians 9:12-14

- Our service not only meets the needs of others, but shows God our gratitude for all he has done for us
- Serving is a way our faith is put into action – others will see our faith and point them to God. It is another way we can share our faith!

- Living a life of service fulfills many of God's commands. It is a way that our faith and the Bible come to life

Galatians 6:10

- We should have an attitude of service towards all people, but first and especially to the family of believers

Practicals –

1. Look for ways that you can serve others
2. Consider and offer ways you can serve the church
3. Be responsible when asked to serve (ushering, Kingdom Kids, clean-up, food preparation, etc.).
4. Be grateful for the opportunity when asked.

The Fruit of the Spirit – Study 10

Revelation 2:26

- What is promised to those who do the will of God to the end?
- The question is, are we capable of doing God's will?
- The world seems to be a long sad of history of people being unwilling or unable to keep to God's will

Joshua 24:19-20

- Joshua's remarks to the Israelites here are reflective of a constant problem pointed out by the Old Testament leaders and prophets – that people are unable to do God's will

Jeremiah 17:9

- The heart was the will, the seat of action and emotion
- Because mankind has fallen in sin, we receive a fallen nature, a tendency to sin from our predecessors
- This means that no human, in our present state will be capable of keeping God's will or obeying his Covenant

Genesis 3:1-6

- We can trace this all to the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve chose to do their own will rather than God's
- Ultimately, sin is simply doing our will rather than God's

Isaiah 5:1-7

- Isaiah describes the situation that even in Israel, among God's own people he could not find the fruit of anyone who would obey his Covenant and do his will

Ezekiel 31:27-34

- What does God promise he will give his people under the New Covenant that would come?
- God says that the primary characteristic that will come from the New Covenant and the new heart is the ability for people to know God, to walk with him and obey him

Matthew 26:36-39

- In what ways does this scene echo Genesis 3?
- Here we have Jesus intentionally going into a garden to reverse what Adam and Eve had failed to do?
- He would go into the garden and do God's will, something that humans are incapable of doing on our own

John 15:1-17

- This passage is an echo of Isaiah 5
- If we remain in Christ and in his love, we can do what could not be previously done – we can bear the fruit of doing God's will
- The most visible aspect of that fruit is loving those that are in Christ

Hebrews 12:14

- Holiness is the embodiment of God's will
- The location of holiness is the life of Christ
- If we remain in his life and strive to embrace it, he will empower us to grow in the ability to do God's will

Mark 3:31-35

- Can we do God's will
- Is it that those who do God's will are family or the other way around

Romans 12:1-2

- What is the primary way that we turn from doing our own will to doing God's will?
- In transforming our mind we can begin to break away from the patterns of the world and do God's will

Galatians 2:20

- Paul knew that the only way for him to bear the fruit of the Spirit was to die to self and strive allow the Holy Spirit to live the life of Christ in him

Galatians 5:13-25

- The choice to bear the fruit of the Spirit is ours
- We have to make the choice to die to self and resist the temptations of the flesh
- If we do, God will empower us to see the work of the Spirit in our lives in ways that we could never accomplish on our own

The Heart of Confession – Study 11

Luke 11:1-4

- When Jesus taught us how to pray, it included confessing our sins to God. Confession is a part of our life in Christ.
- Confessing our sins to God shows that we recognize our own sin and our constant need for him

Why confess our sins?

Proverbs 28:13

- When we confess our sins honestly, we renounce them and show that we want to get rid of them
- We find mercy and are able to grow in our relationship with God

Psalms 32:1-5

- We remain in God's forgiveness when we confess
- When we don't confess our sins we show that we are still clinging to them and put ourselves in danger of moving outside of the life of Christ where we have forgiveness

I John 1:5-10

- We have fellowship with one another, the blood of Jesus cleanses us and the word comes to life
- If we do not confess, it is the same as saying that we are without sin. Our lives in Christ should be transparent – there is no hiding (darkness) in God
- Confession should be a part of our daily life – in our prayers and in our conversations with one another.

James 5:16

- Confess to one another so we can pray for each other and find healing
- It is God's plan for us to confess to each other
- Outside of Christ there is fear of being transparent and talking about sin for fear people will hold it against us or feel differently about us. In Christ, we help each other with our struggles and sin through prayer, the word and relationship
- A refusal to confess our sins to other believers demonstrates that we fear what man thinks of us over what God knows of us

Acts 19:18-20

- A community of believers that engages regularly in confession shows that they value God's will over the perceptions of man
- A community that confesses will put itself into position to be used powerfully by God

Ecclesiastes 12:13

- Fearing God is the beginning of wisdom (Prov. 9:10)
- When we are afraid or ashamed to confess sins to other humans, it demonstrates that we fear their opinions more than God's

Psalms 44:20-21

- God knows the secrets of our hearts?
- He knows what we do and the motives behind them.
- We cannot hide our sins from God and God is whom we should be concerned about. So, there is no benefit to hiding them from each other

Philemon 1:6

- We are called to share in the partnership or sharing of our faith as a community with other believers
- Part of that partnering is confessing our sins to one another

- It is only when we share in the faith with others that we can truly understand all of the good things that are available in Christ

Philippians 2:1-7a

- It takes humility to confess our sins to God and one another.
- If we imitate Christ and consider ourselves nothing, we will have nothing to hide
- We won't concern ourselves with reputation or what people think, but we'll have the same concern that Jesus did...doing God's will (John 17:4)

Announcing the Kingdom – Study 12

Genesis 1:26-30

- Part of God's design for humans was that we would represent him by working for him
- We are made to be in an intimate relationship with God and represent by spreading his rule

Genesis 3:17-19

- Sin not only stripped man of the full image of God, it left men and women incapable of ruling over God's creation and expanding his rule

Exodus 19:3-6

- God chose Israel, the descendants of Abraham, to be the restored humanity – the people that would do his will and rule with him in his kingdom
- A priest was someone who could go directly into the presence of God and represent others
- The Kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God within us
- Israel, in the Old Testament, pointed to God's Kingdom but was never the realization of it
- The words "Kingdom of God" never occur in the Old Testament
- The few times that God says "My Kingdom" are references to the coming of the Messiah

Isaiah 11:1-9

- God begins to promise the coming of this kingdom that would be brought about by the Messiah
- It would be characterized by concern for the spiritually poor, and by righteousness
- It was also intended for all people of all nations

Joel 2:28-32

- The Jews thought that when God sent the Messiah and his Kingdom that it would end history
- They missed the point that God was going to break into history, not end it (Dan. 2:44-45)
- God is transforming this present age through his Kingdom, preparing it for the age to come

Mark 1:14-18

- Jesus came to usher the Kingdom of God into the present age in a new way through his ministry, and more fully through his death and resurrection
- His entire ministry was about announcing that the Kingdom of God was breaking into the present age

Matthew 28:18-20

- Following Jesus' resurrection he offers this charge to his disciples – words that clearly parallel the original instructions to Adam and Eve to be fruitful, fill the earth, and take charge of it
- In Christ, the Kingdom of God is restored
- What is one of the primary activities, according to this verse, of the Kingdom of God?
- Of whom are we to make disciples? It's not just the people like us but all people

Luke 9:23-26

- In order to truly announce the Kingdom of God, we have to leave our old lives fully behind (see Gal. 2:20)

2 Corinthians 5:15-21

- We are called to be ambassadors of the Kingdom of God
- This involves evangelism and sharing our testimony, but it also embraces all aspects of our life
- The Kingdom of God is the rule and reign of God in every area of life
- Spreading that Kingdom is important but simply announcing it is not the sole area in which we engage in spreading the Kingdom

Matthew 6:9-15

- Our lives should reflect our prayers
- This means that our lives should involve allowing the Kingdom of God to break into the present age constantly through our lives everywhere we go
- We should live the Kingdom daily and let others see what it looks like
- We anticipate God's age to come by living it in the present

Acts 2:42-47

- Here is snapshot of a group of people living the Kingdom of God in real terms
- What things does it say that they were devoted to?
- What things did they do very differently from the society around them?
- This doesn't mean that this is the only way to live out the Kingdom of God, the details will look different from place to place (for instance, selling their property and possessions was not only a way to provide for one another but served as a powerful denunciation of the Jewish security in their land and wealth)

Romans 10:14-15

- We don't reduce God's Kingdom to just the way we live though
- We must also announce it
- People cannot come to faith in the life of Christ and enter into the Kingdom of God without hearing the Gospel preached to them from another person – that is the way that God has set up his plan

Ephesians 2:8-10

- Notice the three aspects of "work" here
- We are the work of God in Christ, meaning we are saved by God
- We are not saved by our own works or efforts because we could never earn the life of Christ
- We are saved in Christ, however, in order to work, to be a part of and announce the Kingdom of God

Acts 8:4; 13:31

- The role of the early church was to act as witnesses of the Gospel, the resurrection of Christ, and to preach that wherever they went
- We, in a similar way, are called to be witnesses of what the Gospel is and what it has done in our lives
- We, too, should do this wherever we go
- This probably sounds a little scary which is normal, but if it sounds like a burden that we don't want to participate in, then we have to ask if we really understand what we have in the life of Christ

Resurrection – Study 13

2 Timothy 2:8-11

- What does Paul say, in shorthand, is his gospel message
- The gospel is the declaration that Jesus was the Davidic Messiah that had defeated death and made that victory available to those who would have faith in his life

1 Corinthians 15:1-21

- Again Paul says that his gospel is the declaration of Jesus' victory over death
- He also says that Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee (or the firstfruits) of the rest of the "crop" which is our resurrection
- What does Paul say, in verses 12-19, is the negative ramifications if there is no resurrection from the dead
- For a sample of other passages that speak of the importance of the resurrection of the dead in the preaching of the apostolic church see: Acts 1:21-22; Acts 2:25-36; Acts 4:1-3; Acts 4:32-33; Acts 17:16-18; 31-33; Acts 23:6-8; Acts 24:10-21; Romans 1:1-6; Colossians 1:23; Hebrews 6:1-2

What is the Resurrection?

1 Corinthians 15:42-49

- For Paul the problem was not with the body itself but with sin and death which had taken up residence producing corruption, dishonor and weakness
- Being human is good, being an embodied human in good, being a rebellious human, a decaying human, a human dishonored through bodily sin and bodily death is bad
- What needs replacing is not the body but the animating force that controls the will
- The words translated "natural" and "spiritual" have to do with what animates the body not the substance of which it is made
- Paul is saying that at the resurrection of those in Christ, our natures that are currently animated by our own human souls will be transformed by the Spirit to be animated by God's own Spirit – Our tendency to sin will be gone and dealt with
- Paul says in Romans 8:9-11 that the process of choosing to walk according to the Spirit rather than our own fleshly desires in the present age trains us for and anticipates that time when we will be transformed fully

2 Corinthians 5:1-8

- Paul describes a three stage process which includes:
- Our present unredeemed bodies (He refers to this as our earthly tents)
- The intermediate stage when we will have passed through physical death and into the presence of the Lord awaiting resurrection (He calls this "being naked")
- The resurrection body (He calls this our heavenly dwelling because saying something was heavenly meant it was aligned with the will of God and because the Scriptures promise that the resurrection bodies and the new creation are being kept in heaven until God comes and restores all things including our bodies. See Matthew 19:28; Acts 3:19-21; Romans 8:20-24; Colossians 3:1-5; 1 Peter 1:3-5

2 Peter 3:3-15

- Peter is answering those who were already mocking the belief in the resurrection of those in Christ and the onset of the new creation
- Many people think that Peter is saying that the whole world will be burned up and destroyed but that cannot be the case based on both an understanding of the language he uses and two important pieces of internal logic:
 - o First, Peter says that what he is describing is similar to the destruction that came upon the world during Noah's flood. The word he used throughout this passage that is translated "destroy" means to "dissolve," "unloose," or "overthrow." Peter says that what he is talking about will be of a similar nature of cleansing destruction as the flood. The flood was certainly not an annihilation of the physical universe and neither is what Peter is describing.
 - o Second, Peter says in verses 14-15, that he is writing of the same things that Paul writes of, but nowhere do we see Paul describing the annihilation of the world. Paul speaks of resurrection and restoration of the universe (see Romans 8:18-25 for example)

- When Peter refers to the elements being destroyed, he uses a word which can mean elements as we might think of as atoms, etc., but more frequently the word was used as a figure of speech referring to the a, b, c's of the world (especially in a negative sense). Peter is then saying that in the resurrection, the basic principles of the world opposed to God will be unloosed and judged for what they are
- Peter's use of "laid bare" was a figure of speech that referred to being revealed in judgment
- When he speaks of fire, he is using a common Jewish reference to God's presence as the consuming fire (Ex. 24:17; Deut. 4:24; 2 Sam. 22:9; Ps. 18:8; Isa. 30:27, 30; Heb. 12:29)
- The new heavens and new earth refers to God's restored universe after the resurrection (Rev. 21:1-5)

When Will it Take Place?

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

- The early Christians were so confident that Jesus' physical resurrection guaranteed theirs as the firstfruits (1 Cor. 15:20) that they were prepared for it to happen at any time. They simply didn't know when it would take place so they spoke of its coming as being near and imminent, which it always is. Simply because it has yet to take place does not mean that it won't or that we have to come up with crazy theories to explain that resurrection has already happened as a spiritual event or something that happens when we die (2 Timothy 2:15-18)
- Because of this eager expectation, there was much talk of those who were alive at the resurrection being transformed. This led some to wonder what happened to those who had already died. Did they miss out?
- Paul says, first that no one know when the resurrection will come but when it does it will not be a secret coming or something that could be missed.
- It will include the dead in Christ that he will raise and will also include the transformation of those still alive
- Paul says that they will be caught up together in the clouds to meet in the air
 - o This is clear allusion to Moses entering into the glory cloud of the presence of God (Ex. 24:15-18)
 - o The word translated "meet" was actually a very specific word that denoted meeting and escorting someone important back into town (Matt. 25:1, 6; Acts 28:15)

What the Resurrection Means in the Present

Romans 6:1-14

- Our baptism into Christ is not only the entrance into the death, life, and resurrection of Christ, it is also a present participation in that life
- The life and resurrection of Christ is not just a future hope
- We don't just enter into a future resurrection but that we begin to live the reality of that future in the present

1 Corinthians 15:58

- Paul writes this verse in summary of his long exposition on resurrection
- Dying to self, undergoing the persecution and trials of the Christian faith, and the work that we do in the Lord are not in vain because they will matter in the resurrection, in the age to come
- What we do now is an anticipation of the age to come, it is learning to live by the values of that time and is not simply doing things for the sake of being blindly obedient

Suffering, Trials, and Persecution – Study 14

The nature of suffering in the OT

- We are talking about suffering in the form of persecutions, trials, opposition and struggles not strictly pain or disease
- The primary view of the OT was that obedience would bring blessing and disobedience to God would result in suffering – this was not always the case, but was the normal view and order of things under the Old Covenant
- We can see several examples of this in the Old Testament
 - o Numbers 14:31-35
 - o Deuteronomy 28 – blessings for obedience; suffering for disobedience
 - o Psalm 107:17
 - o Proverbs 13:20

He must suffer many things

- The picture of the Lord's Messiah was quite different from that
- He would perfectly obey God but still would suffer
- Psalm 22:22-24
 - o Prophecy seemed confusing that this one would praise God but still suffer and not be scorned by God
- Isaiah 53:3
- Luke 17:25
 - o Jesus must suffer many things and be rejected

We automatically think of suffering as bad, for those in Christ it has a purpose

Our participation

- Acts 5:41; 9:16 – Saul would be shown how much he must suffer
- 1 Peter 2:19-23
 - o We suffer because he suffered
- Philippians 1:29-30; 3:10

The new nature

- Hebrews 2:10
 - o He was made complete through suffering
- Hebrews 5:7-10
 - o He learned obedience in the sense that he became fully familiar with what it meant to do God's will through suffering
 - o "Suffering" means: pressed, tribulation, affliction, distress, suffer

The purpose

- 2 Timothy 2:3-12
 - o Suffering is competing according to the rules for us
 - o We have entered into his resurrection life and so live as he did
 - o We will get hurt following Christ – everyone gets hurts – life's not fair
 - o The question is what we're going to do with it
 - o Scars show what you've been through – be proud of them
 - They are evidence that
 - You got hurt
 - You got over it
 - You have empathy
- 2 Corinthians 1:3-7
- 1 Peter 4:12-19
- Colossians 1:24-27

- Sharing the gospel involves facing suffering
- It is the job of God's servant to take suffering on ourselves for the sake of others so that they can understand what Jesus did and what's available to them
- Hebrews 12:7-11
 - "Paidea" - Means "training and education of especially children" – instruction which aims at increasing virtue
 - Athletic discipline
 - We're not talking about punitive or self-imposed suffering
 - Lord's prayer – suffering is not evil

The result

- Romans 5:1-5
 - We're often willing to serve or be benevolent as long as it doesn't cause us discomfort but we certainly don't want any part of suffering
 - When we counsel those who are suffering (or our kids) our immediate reaction is to show them what to do to get rid of their suffering but God wants that suffering, those trials, that discomfort
 - It is only through that that we can become complete
- James 1:2-3
 - What do Trials produce in us
 - Perseverance brings completeness in the life of Christ

Stewardship – Study 15

Genesis 1:26-30

- The vocation of humans that are in a right relationship with God, from the very beginning, is to serve as stewards over God's creation
- A sure sign of being in a state of rebellion against God is to provide for ourselves rather than acting as stewards over God's creation
- Psalm 8:4-9 demonstrates what humans, made in the image of God were intended to be, but failed to live up to because of sin

Genesis 4:3-5; Genesis 14:17-20

- Offering a portion of resources to God goes back beyond the law given in Exodus
- Giving part of our resources to God is part of our stewardship because it is a recognition that we are stewards, someone managing someone else's resources, rather than owners of our own resources
- Giving our time, abilities, money, etc. back to God is a declaration that we are in a restored relationship with him and are acting as his stewards rather than as owners

Luke 19:11-27

- The context of this passage has to do with Jesus' criticism of Israel in being poor stewards of what God had given them but the principle applies to the stewardship that is expected of all of God's people
- God is looking for people who will serve as his stewards and care for the resources that he has given us
- We are called to be stewards of the things that God has given us

Matthew 28:18-20

- Jesus calls his disciples to take on the original role that was designated for humans
- We are to be stewards of his creation and expand his kingdom, his rule as his stewards
- To do this properly we must remember that we need to seek his kingdom first with every area of our lives (Matthew 6:33) – to do anything less would be to act as a poor steward

Luke 12:35-46

- All Christians have been called to be stewards or servants of God's resources
- Good stewards are always ready and always living in view of the reality to which we belong in the life of Christ
- When we are selfish, self-focused, or not good managers we demonstrate a lack of belief in the reality of God's ownership and rule over all of creation and our role as mere stewards of all to which he has entrusted us
- Stewards don't bury or put to waste resources but put them to work by offering them to God first and then making them profit
- To do this we must learn to be stewards in all areas of our lives

1 Peter 4:10

- We are called to be stewards of the grace that God has given us
- It may be gifts, talents, abilities, time, knowledge, etc.
- What are the things that God has given you to call you to be a good steward of?
- What does it mean to be a good steward of:
 - o Gifts
 - o Talents
 - o Abilities
 - o Time
 - o The Word of God
 - o The Gospel

Galatians 2:20

- In order to truly be God's steward we must first give up the rights of ownership to our own life

- We cannot be good stewards in the life of Christ that has been given us if we insist on maintaining ownership rights to our own lives

Malachi 3:7-12

- This passage was written during the Old Covenant but the principles of giving and stewardship came before the law and continue to apply in the New Covenant
- They had demonstrated that they had left God by being poor stewards and refusing to give God what was his
- God asked for a mere tenth of all that he had given them as a reminder to them that everything had come from him and that they were mere stewards
- The tithe means literally "a tenth"
- The difference in covenants means that our blessings come in the life of Christ rather than in physical and material blessings but we are still called to be stewards in every area of our life including our finances
- Being a good steward means more than just giving ten percent to God, though, it means managing our resources well and being good stewards so that we can give generously to God and to those in need

Luke 17:18-30

- The problem for this young man was not that he was wealthy
- The problem was that he was a poor steward because he wasn't willing to recognize that it all came from God
- God doesn't always call us to return everything to him but we need to be willing to
- The one thing that he lacked was not the act of giving all that he had to the poor but the unwillingness to recognize in his actions that everything came from God and that God was able to provide for him

Luke 21:1-2

- Being a good steward is more about giving all that we have than just having a lot
- It is being willing to recognize that everything comes from God
- What convictions about stewardship in all areas of your life have you gained from this study?