

# As Your Soul Prospers

## Introduction:

The life of a believer is to be progressive. We start as new babes in Christ, but as we grow and learn, we are to become mature and stable in our walk with Christ. The theme of this series, “As Your Soul Prospers,” is taken from 3 John 2. The elder makes the connection between prosperity, health, and one’s soul. This series addresses prospering in the spiritual, financial, health, and relational contexts. As we grow, let us grasp the promises of God so that we can experience the balanced and full realm of prosperity.

*Pastor Jon*

## Contents

Lesson 1: As Your Soul Prospers .....	2
Lesson 3: Financial Prosperity/Divine Provision .....	4
Lesson 4: Giving God’s Way.....	5
Lesson 5: Becoming Debt Free.....	6
Lesson 6: Staying Financially Healthy .....	7
Lesson 7: Divine Health .....	8
Lesson 8: Receiving Healing .....	9
Lesson 9: Recovery from Abuse .....	11
Lesson 10: Recovery from Addiction .....	13
Lesson 11: Relational Health .....	14
Lesson 12: Managing Anger and Hurt .....	15
Lesson 13: Managing Offense .....	16
Recommended Resources .....	18

Unless otherwise noted, Scripture quotations are taken from the King James Version of the Bible, public domain.

We are pleased to share these lessons for your spiritual enrichment. As with the ACTS magazine, we would like to take a moment and remind our readers that the General Council Churches of God, (Seventh Day), is in a state of constant growth and we all have different backgrounds, it is possible that your views may differ somewhat from those presented in this study. We pray these lessons may be used as a point of entry for your own study.  
*“Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21 NKJV).*

# Lesson 1: As Your Soul Prospers

**Scripture Text:** Joshua 1:1-9

**Memory Verse:** *“Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do.”* Deuteronomy 29:9

**Lesson Aim:** To define what it means to prosper and what God has promised.

What does it mean to prosper? To prosper means, “To succeed, thrive, grow, etc. in a vigorous way.”<sup>1</sup> Thrive, grow, succeed. Success may be defined as, “A favorable or satisfactory outcome or result.”<sup>2</sup> God wants us to succeed. He wants us to thrive. He wants us to grow! Jesus came that we might have abundant life. Success should be the norm, not the exception.

The challenge we face is the measure of success. The world measures success by material wealth, fame, and fortune. Jesus asked, *“What shall it profit a man, if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?”* (Mark 8:36). God measures success by our obedience and ability to live in His promises.

The purpose of prosperity is to give God glory, not for us to hoard and gloat over our material gain and imagined success. When we thrive and grow in a vigorous way, we prove to the world that living for God is better than living without Him. The Father desires that we should be an example to the world, just as He desired for Israel.

God has designed for us to prosper. He expects us to prosper. He gave Joshua a blueprint for success. *“This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success”* (Joshua 1:8).

Jesus, gave us the New Testament version in Matthew 6:33, *“But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.”*

Note how they parallel. God told Joshua to keep speaking and meditating on His law, observe (do) what is written and then you will thrive, grow, and have good success. Jesus told His disciples to seek the Kingdom and God’s righteousness first, and then they would have what everybody else is struggling for.

God wants us to prosper, not only financially, but also in our emotional, mental, and physical health. The Father’s desire is for us to prosper relationally, too, starting with our relationship with Him. Our marriages and family relationships should be healthy. They should be functional and reflect the presence of God and the impact of a Spirit-led life.

Beloved, let us adjust our priorities and put God first. The first focus must be to prosper our soul. We must press to ensure that we succeed spiritually and thereby embrace Godly prosperity in its fullness.

## Interact with God’s Word:

1. How does the world (and religious people) measure success? How does that differ from success by God’s standards?
2. Prior to this lesson, what did success mean to you?
3. Why are we prone to measure success by the world’s standards?
4. Is it possible for a believer to have a preference of what area they choose to prosper in? If so, how?
5. Discuss the practical application of God’s instruction to Joshua. Joshua 1:8; Deuteronomy 29:9
6. How does seeking the Kingdom of God first play out in real life? Discuss the parallel between Joshua 1:8 and Matthew 6:33.

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<sup>1</sup> Michael Agnes, *Webster’s New College Dictionary* (Cleveland, Ohio: Wiley Publishing, Inc.), 2007, 1152.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 1429.

## Lesson 2: Prospering Spiritually

**Scripture Text:** 3 John

**Memory Verse:** *“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.”* 3 John 1:2

**Lesson Aim:** To reinforce the concepts and tools necessary to prosper spiritually.

God wants you to prosper spiritually! When God called you, He made an investment into your life; just as one does with a financial investment. His expectation is for you to grow, advance, and expand your border. Spiritual prosperity points to being successful in spiritual things, i.e., having a thriving relationship with God.

But how does the believer prosper spiritually? Jesus is the source of our spiritual prosperity. He is the author and finisher of our faith (Hebrews 12:2). In the literal sense, an author is a creator and has the authority to change the character of his making. We must look to Him because the potential for growth is maximized through His supernatural grace and anointing.

Our Author uses the tools and concepts addressed in the “Strengthening Your Walk” lesson series to change us and fashion us to become the person He wants us to be. Let’s review some of them.

In order to be spiritually vibrant and grow vigorously, every believer needs to embrace the Word of God. Joshua’s success was totally dependent on his meditating, speaking, and doing God’s Word. It is through the Word of God that we win the battle of the mind. Our thoughts determine our desires, our actions, and our destiny.

Prayer and fasting are two components that will launch believers into sustained spiritual prosperity. Prayer and fasting are not options, but mandatory in order to grow and be sustained.

Praise and worship must not be ignored. These are powerful tools and weapons of spiritual warfare that connect us with God and inflict severe damage on the adversary.

How we value regular fellowship with other believers can make or break the success of a believer. God uses the fellowship of other believers to strengthen us, produce the fruit of the Spirit within us and give us opportunities to show our love for God and others in a practical way.

Empowerment through the Holy Spirit is critical to being spiritually productive, effective and successful. We need the power of God to maximize our spiritual success.

Love and forgiveness. Without these, all we do will profit nothing in the eyes of God. Our motives and our ability to obediently forgive matter far more than the display of all our gifting and achievements. Without love, there is no profit.

Sin is the greatest barrier to a believer maintaining a flourishing relationship with God. Unrepentant sin will create a pit of darkness, hinder the operation of the Holy Spirit and diminish your success. Proverbs 28:13 states, *“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.”*

First things first! John would say to Gaius, *“Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth”* (3 John 1:2). We must have the proper priorities in order to pursue holistic prosperity. The spiritual disciplines will help keep us free from sin and lay the groundwork for spiritual growth. Let’s grasp the same desire to prosper and be in health as our inner man (our being) thrives and grows in a vigorous way.

### Interact with God’s Word:

1. Is it possible to grow spiritually without the primary spiritual disciplines of regularly receiving the Word, prayer, worship, and fellowship?
2. Share some benefits you have enjoyed from regularly reading the Word of God.
3. Discuss the analogy that Jesus, being the author and finisher of our faith, has the right to change the characters and circumstances of His story. How does that change your perspective of life?
4. What can we do to ensure sin does not creep in and bar us from prospering spiritually? Psalm 119:11; 1 John 1:9; 2 Corinthians 7:1; Galatians 5:24; 1 Peter 3:15
5. Discuss some practical ways to use spiritual disciplines to prosper our souls.
6. What evidence did John the Elder have that Gaius was prospering spiritually? 3 John 1:3-6

## Lesson 3: Financial Prosperity/Divine Provision

**Scripture Text:** Deuteronomy 28:1-14

**Memory Verse:** “No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” Psalm 84:11

**Lesson Aim:** To provide an understanding of God’s divine provision.

Poverty is unnecessary! It does not help anyone and it is not a gift from God. As believers, our God has promised to be our Provider. He is more than enough (El Shaddai) and able to do exceeding abundantly above all we can ask or think. God is our Source and our God will supply all our need according to His riches in glory by Jesus the Messiah (Philippians 4:19).

The world economic situation is bad. Countries are overloaded with debt. The situation for many families is not much better. Economic turbulence, recession, loss of employment, the impossibility of saving, and the weight of debt have many living from paycheck to paycheck with no hope in sight. Despite your specific circumstances, there is hope. Why? “Because in times of financial uncertainty, those who follow biblical principles of money management will not only survive, but even prosper.”<sup>1</sup>

But what is financial prosperity? Mike Murdock puts it this way, “Prosperity is having enough of Divine Provision to complete a Divine Assignment.”<sup>2</sup>

God wants you to prosper financially! He wants you to have sufficient finances to provide for the necessities of life, to provide for your loved ones, to help the poor, to support the Gospel and send ministers all over the globe to preach the gospel, and to complete your Divine Assignment (whatever it may be).

Prosperity is a gracious move of God. The price Jesus paid on Calvary covered our sins, our health, and our provision. It’s part of the covenant blessings, but you must co-labor with God in order to receive.

Faith is the key to everything in the Kingdom. In the same way that we receive salvation from sin—“*We are saved by grace through faith*” (Ephesians 2:8)—we receive divine provision—**by faith**. Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. Without the knowledge of the Word, we are hopeless, but hearing and doing the Word gets results.

The adversary wants to keep you ignorant of God’s Word. He knows that if he can keep you ignorant of the Word of God, he can defeat you in every area of life. His number one weapon against us is lack of knowledge (Hosea 4:6). If he can keep you from the Word, he can keep you bound. Your power and victory are in the Word.

Due to ignorance of the Word, many do not believe it’s God’s will for them to prosper. Millions refuse to obey the very basic and simple laws of God concerning tithing and giving. Others refuse to sow consistently or be thankful and wait patiently for their harvest.

It is through God’s Word that we receive God’s wisdom and knowledge. We must seek Him for what He gives, not what we want! His knowledge and ideas lead to prosperity. Our part is to seek Him and do the Word.

You must know and believe that it’s God’s will for you to prosper. Jesus came that we might have abundant life (John 10:10). God takes pleasure in the prosperity of His servant (Psalm 35:27). He has given us power to get wealth (Deuteronomy 8:18).

Divine provision is a covenant blessing and a gracious move of God (that means we have to co-labor with Him). We are to be the salt of the earth and the light of the world. Know the Word, believe the Word, do the Word, and prosper!

### Interact with God’s Word:

1. Given that the adversary’s primary weapon against us is ignorance of the Word, how can we counteract or disarm that weapon? Hosea 4:6; Joshua 1:8 Discuss and give examples.
2. List three Scriptures that confirm God’s promise of divine provision.
3. Financial blessings are conditional. Read Deuteronomy 28:1-14. Identify the various blessings God promised then identify the conditions for receiving the promises.
4. How does our enemy try to keep us from the Word? Why? Mark 4:1-20
5. What is the connection between faith and financial provision? Where does obedience fit in? 1 Kings 17:8-16
6. Consider Mike Murdock’s definition of prosperity. How does that impact/compare with your previous thoughts or definition of prosperity?

<sup>1</sup> Ron Blue, *Taming the Money Monster* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1989, 1993), p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Mike Murdock, *31 Reasons People Do Not Receive Their Financial Harvest* (Dallas, Texas: Wisdom International), 1997, 17.

## Lesson 4: Giving God's Way

**Scripture Text:** 2 Corinthians 9

**Memory Verse:** *“But this I say, he which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.”* 2 Corinthians 9:6

**Lesson Aim:** To share the importance and benefits of giving God's way.

In Lesson 3, we mentioned how millions ignore God's basic and simple laws concerning tithing and giving. For many people, giving is a sensitive issue. It touches the core of their being.

Why is giving important? Well, giving is a reflection of God's character. God is a giving God, a genuine giver, and the most generous. He has given us life, the earth, power and dominion, and most of all, the gift of salvation through His Son, Jesus the Messiah (John 3:16). Through this sacrificial gift, God gave us redemption, justification, and reconciliation. Giving is important to God.

Our selfish nature is wired to receive rather than give. We are born that way and the world system reinforces that nature. However, God wants His people to move from being takers to givers.

God wanted Israel to be the example to the world. He established a system for giving in Israel. They gave: (1) sacrifices to God; (2) tithes to the Levites and the poor; and (3) freewill offerings. Sacrifices were given directly to the Lord and required the Israelites to give their best to God in thanksgiving, dedication, intercession, praise and worship, as well as repentance.

The tithe (one tenth) was established to provide income for the Levites and for the poor. Israel tithed of their crops and animals. The tithe is holy to the Lord (Leviticus 27:30). God promised to bless those who tithed and pronounced a curse on those who did not (Malachi 3:8, 9).

Freewill offerings were given for special projects. People contributed only if they wanted to, only those with willing hearts. At times, the people gave so much that they had to stop them from giving more (Exodus 36:5-7).

The 1st Century church was a giving church. They gave of their substance, their possessions, their hospitality. They took care of the local needs of the brethren, as well as those far away. Should the 21st Century church be any different?

Why should we give? Here are five reasons: (1) God gives; (2) God commands us to give; (3) we are thankful; (4) we want heavenly treasure; and (5) we want our needs supplied.

Here are a few principles that should govern how we give.

- 1) Understand that God owns everything under heaven (Job 41:11). We are just His stewards. A steward is not the owner, but the caretaker. Once you grasp this critical concept, it will change your view of your finances. It all belongs to God—100 percent, and as stewards, we must give an account of what we do with God's resources (Matthew 25:14-30).
- 2) Determine where your treasure is. Your heart will be where your treasure is (Luke 12:34). Our treasure should be in the Kingdom—eternity, not the earth realm. This is significant because it is so easy to see things only from the temporal and be so caught up in the cares of life and deceitfulness of riches that we lose sight of the Kingdom.
- 3) Realize that giving is the cure for greed and materialism. Generosity will kill greed. You cannot be a true giver and covetous.
- 4) Give generously and cheerfully. We should be happy when we give, understanding that, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive”* (Acts 20:35). It is better to be on the giving end.
- 5) Give thoughtfully and appropriately (2 Corinthians 9:7). Giving should be a conscious and reverent act of worship. Give all God asks for and take all He gives.

### Interact with God's Word:

1. Discuss the importance and impact of giving in Israel, the 1st Century church, and today.
2. Discuss the six principles that should govern our giving. How are they relevant? Job 41:11; Luke 12:33-34; 16:10-13; Proverbs 21:25-26; Acts 20:35; 2 Corinthians 9:7
3. What is the blessing of giving cheerfully? 2 Corinthians 9:7-8
4. What is wrong with this statement, “If God is blessing me by supplying my needs, what He gives me should be for me to do what I want and not for someone else”?
5. For each of the following terms, write your thoughts of what comes to mind when considering giving: Joy, Prayer, Finances, Welfare, and Sacrifice.

## Lesson 5: Becoming Debt Free

**Scripture Text:** Revelation 18:1-20

**Memory Verse:** “*The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender.*” Proverbs 22:7

**Lesson Aim:** To outline a biblical perspective on debt and encourage believers on how to get out of debt.

In 1994, author Larry Bates wrote a book, *The New Economic Disorder*, in which he identified five deadly forces that would hit our economy: (1) the banking crisis; (2) federal debt and deficits; (3) business and personal debt; (4) recession/depression; and (5) massive, renewed inflation.<sup>1</sup> So, just the last one remains to manifest.

Given the economic turbulence over the last 30 years, we encourage believers to pursue freedom from debt. “Being debt-free is your best preparation for an uncertain economic future.”<sup>2</sup> Why? Being debt-free gives you more flexibility. Without the burden of outstanding debts, down-sizing or even living day to day is easier.

In this lesson, we will not attempt to address the financial crises caused by long-term unemployment, the prolonged illness or death of a provider (or the illness of any uninsured family member). There are other strategies needed to address these risks. However, even in these circumstances, debt makes the crisis worse.

Credit is not the problem, but the misuse of it. Four common causes of problem debt include: (1) lack of discipline; (2) discontent; (3) searching for security; and (4) searching for significance. Let’s address those briefly.

Lack of discipline. Spending without restraint will leave you broke. Some people are naturally more self-disciplined than others. The undisciplined are prone to repeatedly make the wrong decisions. One financial teacher put it this way, “Where there is slack, there will be lack.”

The lack of discipline often stems from discontent. In Hebrews 13:5, the writer instructed the church, “*Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.*” Contentment is a choice.

The need for security is a legitimate need, but nothing in the temporal realm can meet this need. We must find security in God, not material possessions. He promised to never leave nor forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:8).

The search for significance drives some people to make foolish financial decisions. Men often attempt to achieve significance through investments, businesses, and possessions and may try to meet this need through heavy borrowing.

Note that the Bible **does not** say it’s a sin to borrow money, **nor does** the Bible say that borrowing is wise. Instead, there are warnings about debt (Proverbs 22:7) and examples of difficulties caused by debt (2 Kings 4:1). The Bible also **does not** say that God is obligated to bail us out of debt or that being in debt is an exercise of faith.

The Bible **does** say that: (1) it’s wrong not to repay your debts (Psalm 37:21); and (2) it’s foolish to put yourself in a surety situation (Proverbs 6:1-5; 11:15). Also, “Debt may violate two biblical principles: It almost always presumes upon the future, and it may deny God the opportunity to do what he really wants to do in our lives.”<sup>3</sup>

What should the believer do? Take this seriously. There are a number of Christian organizations that specialize in helping people get their finances in order and eliminate their debt, e.g., Crown Financial, Financial Peace University. All require the critical steps of assessing your spending, living on a budget, and accelerated debt repayment.

We should not be lax in either our church or personal finances. The local church should set the example and be debt-free, too! Study God’s Word carefully and develop your own financial convictions. If you need help, counsel, or training, get it. Do the needful. Live by the biblical principles discussed in Lessons 3 and 4 and trust the Almighty to meet your needs as you remain diligent, generous, and content. The road to a debt-free church begins and ends with debt-free families.

### Interact with God’s Word:

1. If security and significance are legitimate needs, how can we properly meet them? Matthew 6:25-33
2. Why is it important to know what the Bible does and does not say about debt? Hosea 4:6 What warnings do we find in these Scriptures? Psalm 37:21; Proverbs 6:1-5; 11:15; 22:7
3. Given the scenario in Revelations 18, what should be our response?
4. Read Proverbs 12:24; 27:23-24. How do these Scriptures relate to the need to assess and curb spending?
5. Consider the plight of the widow in 2 Kings 4, what can we do to alleviate or prevent similar circumstances today?
6. Practical application: Assess your current income and spending, develop a budget, and consider debt reduction. The following links may be helpful.

<http://www.money4lifecoaching.com/crown>

<http://www.mvelopes.com/crown/home>

List the following on a separate piece of paper.

**\*Assessing your current state:**

**\*Developing a budget:**

**\*Debt reduction plan:**

<sup>1</sup> Larry Bates, *New Economic Disorder* (Lake Mary, Florida: Creation House, 1994), pp. 16-21.

<sup>2</sup> Ron Blue, *Taming the Money Monster* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1989, 1993), p. 9.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 71.

## Lesson 6: Staying Financially Healthy

**Scripture Text:** Genesis 39:2-6; 41:47-54

**Memory Verse:** *“A man’s belly shall be satisfied with the fruit of his mouth; and with the increase of his lips shall he be filled.”* Proverbs 18:20

**Lesson Aim:** To provide biblical principles for maintaining financial health.

The last three lessons have given us a great introduction to God’s divine provision, giving His way, and defeating debt. Becoming and staying financially healthy will be an ongoing challenge, but it is achievable and sustainable.

Here are 10 principles that should guide us:

Principle 1—Give everything back to God. It all belongs to Him. Daily surrender everything that God entrusted to you back to Him.

Principle 2—Give faithfully, honestly, and cheerfully to God’s work. You cannot out give God.

Principle 3—Develop a budget and live by it. Budgeting controls expenses. It enables you to handle money objectively.

Principle 4—Avoid borrowing, use credit wisely, get out and stay out of debt.

Principle 5—Save. Saving is a vital part of wise biblical stewardship. Save, but don’t hoard.

Principle 6—Learn to be content. “Contentment is an inner confidence, based on knowing the perfect character of God and trusting in his wise provision.”<sup>1</sup>

Principle 7—Guard against envy, greed, and materialism. Envy is the opposite of contentment and is destructive. Greed denies the adequacy of God’s provision. Materialism has become the norm, “thing-worship”.

Principle 8—Have the right motives. The two healthy motives for wanting to live by biblical financial principles are love and accountability. Because we love God, we want to live the way that pleases Him. Our love for Him should motivate us to manage His resources wisely. Accountability is important when we consider eternity. What will we say when God asks us to account for what he has given us, the gifts of time, resources, and responsibility?

Principle 9—Plan. Have short-term (one year), medium-term (two to five years), and long-term plans (over five years), whether it’s spending or saving (the two go together). If you don’t take the time to calculate the cost of goals, you will have no idea how to prepare for them.

Principle 10—Ask for guidance. People and plans fail for lack of counsel (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22).

Be mindful that it takes time, effort and diligent application of these principles to achieve and remain financially healthy. God will honor our sacrifice and commitment. He is faithful.

Another very important factor that may be more powerful than any one of these principles alone is understanding the power of what we say. You must take authority over your finances. Jesus has given us the authority to use His Name. It is a process, but you can speak to your finances and command them to come in line with God’s Word in Jesus’ Name! You can declare that all “your” finances belong to God. You can declare that you are content. You can command yourself to save and spend wisely. Claim the promises! If you match your actions with your declarations, you can achieve and maintain financial health.

### Interact with God’s Word:

1. Joseph is an excellent example of good stewardship. and prosperity. Discuss the qualities that made Joseph prosperous. Genesis 39:2-6
2. Summarize the application of Principles 1-4 based on the discussions from Lessons 3 through 5. Job 41:11; Luke 6:38; Proverbs 27:23-24; 22:7
3. Consider Principles 5 and 9. Discuss the examples in Scripture that affirm saving and planning? Genesis 41:46-57; Proverbs 6:6-8; Luke 14:28-32; Proverbs 3:5-6
4. Read 1 Timothy 6:6-11. How does this Scripture address Principles 6-8?
5. Although application of these 10 principles is practical and good, discuss the necessity and benefit of taking authority over financial issues, by speaking and declaring God’s will according to Scripture. Romans 4:17

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Berg & Jim Burgess, *The Debt-Free Church* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1996), p. 193.

## Lesson 7: Divine Health

**Scripture Text:** Proverbs 4:20-24

**Memory Verse:** *“Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness: by whose stripe ye were healed.”* 1 Peter 2:24

**Lesson Aim:** To inform us that God has made provision for believers to walk in divine health.

Divine health (that state of being in which one is not always seeking healing, but rather is enjoying health free from illness and successfully countering the attacks of the enemy) is God’s provision for the entire body of Christ. Through the redemption purchased by Jesus the Messiah on Calvary, God has made provision for every believer to walk in divine health.

It has never been God’s will for His people to be bound and oppressed with sickness and disease. He told the children of Israel that they could have supernatural freedom from illness if they would walk uprightly before Him (Deuteronomy 7:14-15). God has extended the same promise and provision toward us in the New Covenant, basing it securely in our blood-bought redemption.

Every Christian has the covenant right to live out his life on this earth free from sickness and disease. Although this does not mean we will never die (death is the last enemy to be conquered by Christ (1 Corinthians 15:25-26)), it does mean that we can live free from sickness while in this mortal body.

Unfortunately, so many Christians suffer today at the hands of disease, not availing themselves of the divine health that rightfully belongs to them. But that doesn’t change the reality of what He has done. Salvation and forgiveness have been purchased for all men and are offered to all. Yet many, whether through ignorance or unbelief or rebellion, do not receive the forgiveness which is so freely offered to them. The same is true of healing.

God’s desire is that His people walk free from illness. He purchased our healing on the cross and gave us numerous ways in which we can receive that healing. If we will walk uprightly before Him, and not allow any hindrances to healing in our lives, then we can walk in the perfect health which has been made available to us.

In order to live in divine health, there are certain things which the believer must do. No one will ever receive anything from the Lord without exercising some degree of diligence. Laziness is not the way to receive from the Lord. There are certain natural laws which cannot be ignored if one is to remain in divine health. God will not bless ignorance or condone stupidity. But if a believer will obey the Word of God and fulfill the criteria which the Word lays out, then he can expect to be able to live in divine health, successfully thwarting the attempts of the enemy to place sickness on him.

### **Interact with God’s Word:**

1. What is “divine health?” What is God’s prescription for maintaining a life of divine health? Proverbs 4:20-24; Exodus 15:26
2. What does it take to walk in divine health? Ephesians 1:18-20; Romans 10:17; 12:2; James 3:10-12
3. If an individual abuses their body through neglect and overwork, all the while believing for divine health, are they really standing on God’s Word? Why or Why not? Discuss.
4. What provisions has God made for every believer to walk in divine health? Isaiah 53:5; 1 Peter 2:24; Psalm 103:3, 5
5. How are we instructed to properly care for our bodies? Are you robbing God of glory by not taking care of your temple? 1 Corinthians 6:19-20; Romans 12:1; Leviticus 11:2-9, 44

## Lesson 8: Receiving Healing

**Scripture Text:** Mark 11:22-26

**Memory Verse:** *“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised.”* Luke 4:18

**Lesson Aim:** To outline the different methods available to us to receive healing.

God is eager to see the sick healed and to be released from their ailments. And so he has given us numerous methods whereby we can receive the healing which He has purchased for us. Since faith is the means by which anything is received from God, it is not surprising to find that each of these methods requires some degree of faith in order to be effective.

Not every believer is on the same level. So God has made these various ways of receiving healing available to us. God will meet us wherever we are in **faith**, so that we may receive healing from Him. Let’s look at six different methods whereby we can receive the healing He has purchased for us.

**(1) Prayer.** This is perhaps the most obvious method of receiving healing. It is the natural response of someone in need to seek God in prayer for deliverance. Jesus specified two basic forms of petition with which we could approach the Father to receive from His hand. They are: (a) the prayer of agreement; and (b) the prayer of faith offered in Jesus’ Name.

(a) **The prayer of agreement.** Jesus said, *“Again I say to you, that if two of you agree on earth about anything that they may ask, it shall be done for them by My Father who is in heaven”* (Matthew 18:19). Jesus’ promise was that any need will be met, including that of healing, if two or more believers will stand together in faith as to the outcome of their prayer. God the Father will do whatever they had agreed upon. The central issue in this method is that of “agreement.” **All parties involved must be of one mind as to God’s will in the matter and as to their faith in the final outcome.** If the person seeking healing is prayed for and yet he himself still believes his illness to be the will of God, the prayer of agreement is of no effect. It is wise to first determine if everyone involved is indeed in agreement.

(b) **The prayer of faith in Jesus’ Name.** Jesus also told His disciples, *“I tell you the truth, My Father will give you whatever you ask in My name. Until now you have not asked for anything in My name. Ask and you will receive, and your joy will be complete”* (John 16:23-24). This includes physical healing. The prayer of faith made in Jesus’ Name will bring results to those who are in need.

**(2) Laying on of hands.** The laying on of hands is by far the most commonly recorded method by which Jesus ministered to those who were sick. Although He sometimes simply spoke words over those who were ill (Matthew 8:7-8, 13; 9:6-7), most of the time He laid His hands on the sick to heal them. Jesus said, just prior to His ascension, that this practice would continue among those that believe (Mark 16:18).

**(3) Anointing with oil.** Anointing with oil has its roots in the Old Covenant, but when the disciples were sent out by Jesus to preach and heal the sick, the Bible records that they anointed the sick with oil and healed them (Mark 6:12-13). This was not a medicinal anointing, such as was common in that day (Luke 10:34). It was a sacred anointing which resulted in supernatural healing. Thus, James commands that the elders pray for the sick, *“...anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord”* (James 5:14).

**(4) Medicine and doctors.** A commonly asked question concerning healing regards the place of medical science. A believer should never feel condemned if he uses the service of a physician. It is not necessarily “unbelief” to use medicine. Some have stopped using prescribed medication thinking that this outward action, in and of itself, was faith, and many have suffered needlessly because of this misunderstanding. A person can build his faith for complete deliverance while still on medication for an illness.

**(5) The Word and the Name.** As we have seen, the Word of God is explicit as to what belongs to us through the redemptive work of Jesus. When attacked by physical symptoms of sickness, we should stand on the Word of God and confess the truth of that Word which declares, *“By His stripes you were healed”* (1 Peter 2:24). Jesus the Messiah bore all sickness and pain. Thus we must have an understanding of our healing being a past-tense reality, rather than a future-tense expectation. Thus, He has given us His Word and the Name of Jesus to combat the forces of Satan and defeat them.

**(6) Gifts of healing** is another distinct method by which people can obtain healing from the Lord. In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul lists nine spiritual gifts. Among these nine gifts is *“the gifts of healing”* (1 Corinthians 12:9). The original Greek makes both words plural, yielding gifts of healings (1 Corinthians 12:28). Kenneth Hagin defines

the gifts of healings in the following way: “It is a supernatural manifestation of healing power through one individual to another for the common good”.<sup>1</sup>

Whenever one discusses divine healing, the question often arises: “What about those who fail to receive divine healing?” Did God fail them? Of course, we know God cannot fail. He is utterly faithful and true. However, know that Jesus is the only one that has had a 100 percent success rate. When a person is not healed, many times it may be due to ignorance, unbelief, doubt, fear, sin, or immorality in that person’s life blocking the power of God from flowing.

**Interact with God’s Word:**

1. There are a number of different ways of receiving healing. What requirement is common to all of them?
2. What are the two types of prayer that Jesus taught which can be used to receive healing from God? Briefly explain each with these Scriptures. Matthew 18:19 and John 16:23-24
3. Why did Jesus lay His hands on the sick, and what was occurring when He did? What does this show us about the laying on of hands? Matthew 8:14-15; Mark 1:41; Luke 4:40; 5:12-13
4. What is the purpose of anointing with oil? Exodus 30:25, 26; 1 Kings 19:16; Psalm 133:2; Mark 6:12-13; James 5:14
5. List five methods given in this lesson for receiving healing, with a Biblical example for each one.
6. Is it always unbelief for a believer to take medicine? Discuss.
7. What are some of the hindrances to receiving healing? Hosea 4:6; Matthew 17:17, 20; Mark 6:5-6; Matthew 13:57-58; Hebrews 10:35; Psalm 66:18; Mark 11:25; 1 Peter 3:12

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Hagin, *Seven Things You Should Know About Divine Healing* (Tulsa: Kenneth Hagin Ministries, Inc., 1979), page 52.

## Lesson 9: Recovery from Abuse

**Scripture Text:** Genesis 41:51; 45:1-15

**Memory Verse:** *“But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”* Isaiah 53:5

**Lesson Aim:** To highlight: (1) the damages that abuse causes; and (2) the fact that the power of Jesus the Messiah is capable of healing the wounds of abuse.

Abuse is the improper treatment of someone for selfish reasons, often to unfairly or unjustly gain benefit. There are different forms of abuse, such as: physical, verbal, sexual, and emotional. Behaviors that constitute any form of abuse whether intentional or unintentional are still considered abuse. Then there is self-abuse, for example, dependence on drugs, prostitution, and self-mutilation.

Physical, verbal, and sexual abuse are most common in the context of spousal, parent-child, and other family member relations. Other contexts in which these forms of abuse often occur are friendships and authority-subordinate relationships, such as pastor-parishioners and employer-employee relations. Anyone can be a victim of abuse. However, women, children, and the elderly are more often victims of abuse than adult men.

**Physical Abuse:** Physical abuse is physical force or violence that results in bodily injury, pain, or impairment. Physical abuse is most common in parent-child and marital and non-marital love relations.

**Verbal Abuse:** Many of us have heard it said that sticks and stones may break our bones but words will never hurt us. However, those who have suffered from verbal abuse know quite well that words do hurt and can be just as harmful as physical blows to the body. The scars from verbal assaults can last for years. These psychological scars often leave people feeling insecure, doubtful of their capabilities and their talents, and sometimes unable to manage the inherent challenges of life.

Most verbal abuse is subtle. Except for name-calling, many people don't recognize verbal abuse as abuse. This is so especially when it comes from a person they believe loves them, such as their spouse, parent or pastor, or from a person they perceive as an authority figure; or when it comes from a person who is in a position of power, for example, one's supervisor, a family provider, or caregiver.

**Sexual Abuse:** Sexual abuse is unwanted sexual activity, with perpetrators using manipulation, force, threat, or taking advantage of victims not able to give consent. Exposing a child to sexual behaviors or activities also constitutes sexual abuse. As reported by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, more than half of all children who are sexually abused are abused by a parent or other relative.

The effects of early sexual abuse last well into adulthood, affecting relationships, work, family, and life in general. According to Barbara E. Bogorad, Psy.D., individual symptoms of sexual abuse tend to fall into four categories:

- (1) **Damaged goods:** Low self-esteem, depression, self-destruction (suicide and self-mutilation), guilt, shame, self-blame, constant search for approval and nurturance.
- (2) **Betrayal:** Impaired ability to trust, blurred boundaries and role confusion, rage and grief, difficulty forming relationships.
- (3) **Helplessness:** Anxiety, fear, tendency towards re-victimization, panic attacks.
- (4) **Isolation:** Sense of being different, stigmatized, lack of support, poor peer relations.

**Emotional Abuse:** Another word for emotional abuse is psychological abuse. This form of abuse is any behavior that is designed to control and subject another human being. It can include anything from constant criticism to more subtle tactics, such as intimidation, manipulation, and refusal to ever be pleased.

Beverly Engel, the author of *The Emotionally Abused Woman: Overcoming Destructive Patterns and Reclaiming Yourself* (1992), states that emotional abuse is like brain washing in that it systematically wears away at the victim's self-confidence, sense of self-worth, trust in their own perceptions, and self-concept. Whether it is done by constant berating and belittling, by intimidation, or under the guise of “guidance,” “teaching,” or “advice,” the results are similar. Eventually, the recipient of the abuse loses all sense of self and remnants of personal value. Emotional abuse cuts to the very core of a person, creating scars that may be far deeper and more lasting than physical ones.

People who have been abused emotionally fail to realize that they hold the power. They have handed their power over to another person – maybe their partner, their friend, their supervisor, or even their pastor. In reality, no one can make you do anything if you do not let them. Realize that only you hold the power. Look for ways in the Word of God to empower yourself.

### **Interact with God's Word:**

1. The perpetrators of sexual abuse are often known to the victims. Sadly they are more often family members than not. What are some descriptors of the incidence between Tamar and her brother Amnon that makes this sexual abuse? 2 Samuel 13:1-14
2. Of the three types of abuse – physical, sexual, and emotional – is there one that is most difficult to overcome? Why? Why not? Are there any that are impossible to overcome? Isaiah 53:5; Psalm 107:20; Luke 1:37

### Recovery from Abuse

3. Break the silence. Tell a trustworthy person. Do not be afraid to ask for assistance. Getting some form of support is always a good idea. James 5:16; Galatians 6:2
4. Let go of anger. Anger is a natural response to injustice, but do not allow it to imprison you. Discuss how a person who has been sexually, physically, or emotionally abused can be obedient to Ephesians 4:26-27, 31-32.
5. Let go of feeling betrayed. The truth is that you cannot make anyone change, you can only control the way you react to them. Instead of focusing on what was done to you, focus on improving your own life. In doing so you will discover your own self-worth. Recognize the real source of the betrayal—Satan using the perpetrator. Abuse is the work of the adversary. To move forward, you must acknowledge that the devil was only using an available vessel to intercept God's plan for your life. Discuss Genesis 45:1-8; 50:20.
6. Let go of shame, self-blame and guilt. First, let's clearly establish that a child victim of abuse is never responsible for the abuse. It is the responsibility of adults to protect our children from harm and danger. It should also be said that a victim – child or adult – is a victim. Victims are overpowered and are made subject to abuse; therefore, there should be no shame, self-blame, or guilt. Shame, self-blame, and guilt are tactics that the enemy uses to keep the abused trapped in a state of painful helplessness. Isaiah 61:3; Romans 10:11
7. Have a vision for yourself. It is important to have a vision of who you would like to become once you have regained control of your life. If it helps, look for role models. 1 Corinthians 11:1-2
8. Use the Word of God to empower yourself. Audibly vocalize the Word to speak life to yourself. The Bible is full of such references, for example, Jeremiah 29:11; Psalm 139:13-18; Romans 3:22; Philippians 4:13.

## Lesson 10: Recovery from Addiction

**Scripture Text:** Romans 6:11-23

**Memory Verse:** *“Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof.”*  
Romans 6:12

**Lesson Aim:** To highlight: (1) the damages that addiction causes; and (2) the fact that the power of Jesus the Messiah is able to deliver from the bondage of addiction.

Often times, when we hear of addiction, we immediately think of drugs or alcohol. But addiction is not limited to those substances. Addiction is the continued overuse of anything—substance or behavior—that results in the alteration of one’s mood. A person can be addicted to anything—exercise, sex, shopping, gambling, sweets, nicotine, television, caffeine, work, the Internet, social network—anything.

On one hand, it could be a substance that is intended to benefit us, like food, but over indulgence in it harms our body. On the other hand, it could be something that is naturally harmful to us, such as intravenous drug use.

Addiction is evidenced by several factors: (1) when the person is in denial; (2) when the person continues in the behavior despite adverse consequences; (3) when the behavior prevents the person from dealing with their life, their personal issues, or their family; and (4) when the person requires increasing dosages of the behavior or substance to obtain the original effect.

Addictions most often serve as a way for us to avoid painful feelings. Therefore, the best way to treat addiction is to address the underlying hurt and emptiness that lead to this destructive behavior. Because the addicted person is seeking relief, they often engage in the addictive behavior for immediate gratification (short-term reward), which is almost always accompanied with delayed negative effects (long-term costs). This leads to physiological dependence on the substance or behavior and is manifested by the body’s ability to adjust to the substance or behavior by incorporating it into its 'normal' functioning. This then creates a significantly higher level of tolerance for the substance or behavior than the person who is not addicted.

Addiction is bondage. All addictions are devices of Satan to enslave and deprive us of the fullness of the life our Creator intended for us. *“The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly”* (John 10:10).

Jesus came to deliver the captives and liberate the bruised. As a believer, we are no longer under the penalty of our sins. We are new creatures. Old things are passed away. Behold, all things have become new! Through His blood, Jesus has redeemed us, justified us, and liberated us to reclaim the dominion that was originally given to Adam.

### **Interact with God’s Word:**

#### **Recovery from Addiction**

1. Admit that you have an addiction. You must own the fact that you have a problem. The road to recovery and treatment will not be effective if you are in denial. How does Romans 7:15-25 relate to the need for an individual to admit that they have an addiction?
2. Identify and address the underlying issue. Seek professional help and spiritual guidance. Bible-based professional counseling, coupled with the exploration and application of God’s healing Word can reveal truths about you that you and those helping you may not be aware of. Discuss in the context of Hebrews 4:12-16.
3. Find healing in the Word of God. As with any type of healing, find and read scriptures that are relevant to your situation. Let the Word heal you by personalizing the Word. Place your name in the text when you read them. Read them aloud. There’s power in the spoken Word.
4. Yield yourself to God. How does the act of submitting to God affect your ability to overcome and recover from addiction? Romans 12:1-2; Romans 13:14; James 4:7-8
5. Change your association and environment. By removing yourself from the company and environment that encourage the addiction, you can reduce temptation. Discuss the necessity of surrounding oneself with strong believers that you can be accountable to and who will encourage you to do the right thing. 1 Corinthians 15:33; Hebrews 10:24-25; Galatians 6:1-2

## Lesson 11: Relational Health

**Scripture Text:** 1 Corinthians 13

**Memory Verse:** *“By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, by your love one to another.”*  
John 13:35

**Lesson Aim:** To discover biblical principles that govern how we should behave and feel toward one another.

According to the Encarta English Dictionary, relationship means the connection between two or more people or groups and their involvement with one another, especially regarding the way they behave toward and feel about one another. Relationships are crucial to God. He is relational. In fact, the primary theme in the Bible is relationship—to God and to one another.

From Creation, God has demonstrated His desire to connect with mankind. He made man in His image and in His likeness so that He could relate to him. God made man a personal, rational, moral being with the ability to think, feel, and desire. Through His voice, God communicated with Adam and Eve, walking and fellowshiping with them in the Garden.

After Adam and Eve sinned, God sacrificed a lamb to temporarily cover the sin and continue communication with man because He was committed to preserving relationship and covenant. To fully restore the connection with man, God sent His only Son, Jesus, to lay His body over the chasm that separated God and man.

As Jesus is united with His Father, He instructs us to be connected to one another. All relationships take work and in the same way that we work on our relationship with God, we must work on our relationships with one another. God wants us to be whole—spiritually, emotionally, socially, physically, intellectually, and directionally.

This wholeness should be reflected in our marriages, our nuclear and extended families, the family of God, and even how we relate to those not in the body of Christ.

We all need relationships, but we must admit that many of our relationships are not as healthy and stable as they should be. Fulfilling relationships do not occur by accident. They result from transparency, honesty, and investment of time and effort. In order for relationships to be fulfilling, one must be willing to become vulnerable, risking emotions and feelings. Intimacy, interaction, and consistent, honest communication are critical to achieving healthy relationships.

It is God’s will for His children to enjoy the benefits of healthy relationships. He has made us ambassadors and given us the ministry of reconciliation so that we can prosper in our relationships and help others to prosper in their relationships.

### Interact with God’s Word:

1. How does Scripture say that we should relate to one another? John 13:34-35; 17:21-22; Colossians 3:9-10, 12-15
2. Identify five barriers that affect our connection to one another?
3. How can we overcome the barriers to our connection? Matthew 18:15-17; Romans 12:9-21; Ephesians 4:31-32; Philippians 3:13-14; Hebrews 13:1
4. Discuss the positive results in these examples of followers of Christ being rightly connected? Acts 2:1-4; Acts 4:31-32; Acts 5:12-18
5. Discuss practical ways the behaviors described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 can impact our relationships?

Personal Reflection: In light of today’s lesson, what will you do to further develop your relational/social health?

## Lesson 12: Managing Anger and Hurt

**Scripture Text:** Ephesians 4:17-32

**Memory Verse:** “Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled.” Hebrews 12:15

**Lesson Aim:** To highlight: (1) the detriment of harboring anger and hurt; and (2) how we can overcome anger and hurt.

In this lesson we will talk about two of the most crippling impediments Christians could possibly face—anger, and hurt. Poor management of these emotions is considered most damaging. While emotions such as pride, envy, or jealousy may be just as damaging, they are less likely to be compounded by feelings of injustice.

When we feel like we are treated unjustly, it puts us in the victim mode as well as in an offensive posture toward others. This makes us helpless, weak, and dependent and/or angry, hurt, and offended. Our emotions adjust the way we view ourselves and we blame others for it. Consequently, we are not only in an unhealthy place but because we do not take responsibility for where we are, the condition is made worse by the projection of our feelings onto others.

Our God has feelings. He experiences the full range of emotions that He created. Let’s highlight a few of the emotions He feels: **1)** He loves (Psalm 36:7; Romans 5:6-8; 8:32; John 3:16); **2)** He gets angry (Deuteronomy 29:27-28; Psalm 7:11; 2 Chronicles 29:10); **3)** He is jealous (Exodus 20:5; Psalm 78:58; Deuteronomy 4:24; 6:15); and **4)** He hates some things (Deuteronomy 16:22; Psalm 11:5; Proverbs 6:16).

God created all these emotions, so they are all good. We are expected to experience the full range of emotions that He created, but our emotions should not dictate our behavior. If the resulting behavior of our emotions is destructive, we must exercise control to adjust the behavior.

What is most frightening about Christians harboring negative emotions is we can deceive ourselves to believe we are free of them. We can house these emotions for decades and appear to the naked eye to be doing well, but we are dying slowly inside or already dead. These negative emotions are like spiritual termites. A house that is infested with termites within the walls or in the structure or even the foundation cannot withstand any pressure. Likewise, when we harbor negative emotions such as anger and hurt, we cannot withstand the attacks of the enemy. We become an open target for his assaults.

### Interact with God’s Word:

Let us first take a closer look at the two emotions we are discussing in this lesson.

1. Anger: According to Wikipedia, “Anger is an emotion that is related to one’s psychological interpretation of having been offended, wronged or denied and a tendency to undo that by retaliation.” Anger is a normal emotion that involves a strong uncomfortable and emotional response to a perceived provocation. Discuss what is meant by “psychological interpretation” and “perceived provocation.” Consider Philippians 4:8.
2. Discuss the implications of the “tendency to undo that by retaliation”. Consider Romans 12:19; Deuteronomy 32:35; and Proverbs 16:17.
3. It appears as if Hebrews 12:15 is telling us that anger and bitterness will *trouble* us and as a result *defile* others. Discuss how this can be done?
4. Hurt: Hurt refers to suffering or pain. In this case, we are referring to emotional suffering and pain. New brain scanning technologies are revealing that the part of the brain that processes physical pain also processes emotional pain. Recent studies have revealed why some people will never get over heartbreaks in the same way that some injuries cause long-lasting chronic pain for some people.

Discuss the emotional pain and the responses to the pain by the following characters—Sarah (Genesis 21:9-13), Esau (Genesis 25:29-34; 27:1-41), Hannah (1 Samuel 1:4-13), and Leah (Genesis 29:30-35). What is healthy or unhealthy about the response taken by each character?

5. If it’s acceptable to experience negative emotions, under what circumstances might it be appropriate for us to have these emotions? Consider Acts 15:36-41 and Matthew 21:12-13. What emotions were experienced in these circumstances? Give examples of instances in which we can appropriately feel hurt or anger.

## Lesson 13: Managing Offense

**Scripture Text:** Luke 17:1-6

**Memory Verse:** “*A brother offended is harder to be won than a strong city: and their contentions are like the bars of a castle.*” Proverbs 18:19

**Lesson Aim:** To highlight: (1) the detriment of harboring offense; and (2) how we can overcome offense.

For the purpose of this study, the term we will use for offense is unforgiveness. Unforgiveness is unfulfilled revenge. It is the single most popular and debilitating weapon that the enemy uses against God's people. It is one of the deadliest poisons a person can take spiritually. A person who cannot forgive is likened to a container of acid. The person is the container and the acid is the offense or unforgiveness.

Unforgiveness has been defined by Worthington and colleagues (Worthington, Sandage, & Berry, 2000; Worthington & Wade, 1999) as a combination of delayed negative emotions (i.e., resentment, bitterness, hostility, hatred, anger, and fear) toward a transgressor. Essentially, unforgiveness is viewed as a stress response with potential health consequences. While scientific evidence of direct linkage between unforgiveness and physical health is lacking, people have testified of their recovery from physical ailments after forgiving. Two examples are deliverance from skin rashes and high blood pressure.

Without a doubt, unforgiveness comes with a very high spiritual cost. Unforgiveness: **1)** prevents God from forgiving our sins (Matthew 6:15); **2)** opens us up to the tormentors (the devil) (Matthew 18:31-34); **3)** blocks God from answering our prayers (Mark 11:24-25); **4)** defiles us (Hebrews 12:15); **5)** gives Satan an advantage (2 Corinthians 2:10-11); **6)** prevents us from entering the kingdom of God (Matthew 7:12, 21); **7)** prevents us from being spiritually fruitful (John 15:5); and **8)** opens us up to curses (Deuteronomy 27:26).

But our responsibility is to forgive others. From a carnal perspective, we can choose to forgive or not to forgive, but as Christians, we really have no choice but to forgive—it is a mandate from God our Father. God sent His Son, Jesus to die for our sins, so that we may be reconciled to Him, without spot or blemish. All He asks is that we give others the same forgiveness that paid for our offenses.

Our love for God is questionable when we cannot forgive. Unforgiveness shows we don't really love Jesus. John 14:24 says, “*He that loveth me not keepeth not my sayings...*” and John 14:15 says, “*If ye love me, keep my commandments*”. Unforgiveness also evidences a lack of love for our brethren. In John 15:12, Jesus commands us to love one another, as He has loved us. True love doesn't hold bitterness or unforgiveness against another. If we are bitter or hold unforgiveness against somebody, then we don't love them as Christ loved us. If we don't keep Jesus' commandments, then it proves we don't love Him either.

### Breaking Free From Unforgiveness

Among other things, such as a love for God and understanding that in the case of offense, it's the enemy at work and not the offender, two things must be in place in order to break free from unforgiveness: (1) obedience to God at all costs; and (2) a defenseless self.

1. **Obey the Word of God** – God has given us explicit instructions concerning the things we are to do to forgive our enemies. A few of them are: Pray for your enemies and those who abuse and misuse you (Matthew 5:44). Bless and do not curse your enemies (Romans 12:14). Seek love (Proverbs 17:9). Seek peace (Psalms 34:14). The real solution to unforgiveness is a sincere and untainted love for God. If we love God enough, we will obey Him, even when it hurts.
2. **Stop Defending Yourself** – If we step back and look at all these emotions—healthy and unhealthy—the focus is on us. In the case of negative emotions, we are often protecting ourselves from pain and hurt. We are not our own (1 Corinthians 6:20; 7:23). We belong to God the Father and He is well able to take care of us. His thoughts toward us are good. So, as difficult as it may seem, we must operate as if we have no rights. We must be defenseless and allow God to fight our battles. Jesus demonstrated this for us (Isaiah 53:7 and Matthew 26:63) and He expects the same of us.

The following two additional steps are essential to breaking free from unforgiveness:

- (1) **Make the Choice**—Forgiveness is a mandate from God, so our only choice is to forgive. However, we cannot forgive without the help of the Holy Ghost. Forgiving is an act of the will. If we don't allow the Holy Ghost to deal with us at the level of our will, we will only be angry and sorry for ourselves. We will never

forgive if we wait until we feel like it. Submit yourself to God and persistently resist the devil in his attempts to poison you with bitter thoughts. If we make the decision to forgive, God will heal our wounded emotions in due time (Matthew 6:12-14).

(2) **Depend on the Holy Spirit**—We cannot forgive without the power of the Holy Spirit working in us. If we are truly willing, God will enable us, but we must humble ourselves and cry out to Him for help. It's quite interesting that in John 20:22-23, immediately after Jesus breathed on the disciples and said, "*Receive the Holy Spirit!*", His next instruction was about forgiving others. We must ask God to breathe the Holy Spirit on us so we can forgive those who have hurt us.

**Interact with God's Word:**

1. Discuss the meaning and implications of "unfulfilled revenge". How was offense handled by the following characters: Esau (Genesis 27:41; 33:1-4); Joseph (Genesis 43:19-34); and the certain king (Matthew 18:23-35)?
2. Why should we forgive when we've been wronged, especially by our brethren, closest friends, or family members? Matthew 6:12, 14-15; Ephesians 4:32; Luke 23:34
3. Read Romans 12:14. What is the meaning of "bless" in this context?
4. Consider the following, "This person has offended me too many times, and this time I cannot forgive him/her." What does Jesus have to say about this mindset? Matthew 18:21-22
5. Are anger, hurt, and unforgiveness mutually exclusive? Why? Why not? Discuss how they might be intertwined.

## *Recommended Resources*

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