



GROW

Learning How to Walk Worthy of Your Calling
(Teacher's Guide)

By Scott Kercheville

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION: Suggestions for Teachers...	3
LESSON 1: Your Identity in Christ (Ephesians 1-3)...	4
LESSON 2: Walk Worthy in Unity (Ephesians 4)...	6
LESSON 3: Walk Worthy in Relationships (Ephesians 5-6)...	8
LESSON 4: Grow in God's Word (Matthew 13)...	10
LESSON 5: Grow in Prayer (Various Texts)...	12
LESSON 6: Grow in Purposeful Suffering (Various Texts)...	14
LESSON 7: Find Your Place (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12)...	16

Introduction: Suggestions for Teachers

Welcome! The purpose of this lesson book is to aid you in teaching Christians how they can walk worthy of the calling to live to the praise of God's glory. This lesson book was written with new and restored Christians in mind, but the material flows from God's word so that it will apply to all. There are two versions of this lesson book - one for students and one for teachers. These lesson books have two differences. First, this introduction is different than the introduction in the student version. Check out introduction to the student version so you know what it contains. Second, the teacher version contains answers to each question written in light italics. The student version contains no answers. The following are some suggestions as you consider how to prepare for and lead each study:

- The answers in the teacher's version are provided to help you clearly and concisely explain the life-changing text to a new Christian. I do not recommend sitting down in a study with my answers printed. As you prepare for each question, study the text for yourself. Think about what you might say to help the student understand and appreciate the text. Read the answer in the teacher's version if you want help formulating your answers. I recommend using your own words by typing them in place of mine or by physically writing them in a student version.
- Take a few minutes before each study to get to know one another.
- Even if you have to break one lesson into two parts, try to keep each lesson to one hour.
- How you use the given introduction is up to you. One of you can read it out loud or you can summarize it in your own words. The given conclusion is also up to you. You may find it helpful to ask them to read it out loud at the end of the study. Do whatever is most natural and effective.
- Alternate who reads the text and allow the student to verbally answer each question. Their answers will often be very concise. As long as they are on track, follow by agreeing and quickly expounding upon their answer to help them gain deeper understanding. Use examples and illustrations where appropriate. Give them time to write down their thoughts between questions.
- Be gentle. Do not try to solve all issues in a few weeks. God works through his word over time.
- This lesson book is not all-inclusive because every person has different needs. Many need help in learning the story of the Bible or in understanding the Holy Spirit's work. Be willing to pause this study or pick up a new study once this one is finished to address other needs and questions.
- Take time to pray together after each study regarding application and issues in each other's lives.
- Some may not be comfortable with the lesson book format. There is certainly nothing wrong with using these lessons as a mental guide to help you simply read and discuss the Bible.

I offer Paul's example in **1 Thessalonians 2:7-13** as encouragement. *"But we were gentle among you, like a nursing mother taking care of her own children. So, being affectionately desirous of you, we were ready to share with you not only the gospel of God but also our own selves, because you had become very dear to us. For you remember, brothers, our labor and toil: we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you, while we proclaimed to you the gospel of God. You are witnesses, and God also, how holy and righteous and blameless was our conduct toward you believers. For you know how, like a father with his children, we exhorted each one of you and encouraged you and charged you to walk in a manner worthy of God, who calls you into his own kingdom and glory. And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers."*

Lesson 1: Your Identity in Christ (Ephesians 1-3)

Who do you think you are? How would you describe your identity? Many say different things. I am tall. I am short. I am single. I am married. I am athletic. I am smart. I am funny. I am quiet. I am rich. I am poor. I am a student. I am Mom. I am Dad. Our identity shapes how we think, talk, and live. Though we are all unique individuals, when we become Christians, God gives us a new identity. Your new identity is to be a child of God. As your Father, God has made every spiritual blessing available to you. Today we are going to consider how portions of **Ephesians 1-3** describe your blessings as a child of God and learn why God has blessed you so richly. Get ready to embrace your new identity and life purpose.

Every Spiritual Blessing (Ephesians 1:1-14)

1. What blessing is described in **1:4**? What is the significance of the timing? What is the goal of this?

We were chosen before the creation of the world. God did not bless Israel because of their goodness, but because he chose them beforehand when he made promises to their fathers (cf. Deut. 7:6-8, 9:4-7). The same is true for us. If God chose us before he created the world, God knew we would be lost beforehand. There is no room for boasting. We were not holy, but Paul says we were chosen to be holy and blameless. Israel was set apart for the same reason (Gen. 18:19; Deut. 10:14-17), but God punished them because they did not obey. Let us not fall into Israel's unbelief. We were chosen to be different - let us live like it!

2. What blessing is described in **1:5**? What does this mean? How can this give us hope in uncertainty?

God predestined us for adoption. In Christ we have been given a pre-ordained destiny to be adopted by the Father. Adoption is a powerful image because the parents choose the children, willingly pay great costs to adopt them, and love them as their own. Imagine being an orphan who feels unloved and insecure about the future. Imagine hearing that parents have chosen to adopt you. You are loved and your destiny is secure. We are not yet with our Father because adoption is our pre-ordained destiny, not a current reality. Hope each day in your future adoption and remember that no matter what difficult, disappointing, bleak times come - your story is not finished. The never-ending best part will soon begin.

3. What blessing is described in **1:7-8**? What does this mean? How can this help us fight against sin?

We have redemption through Jesus' blood. "Redemption" refers to how God delivers people from bad situations. God redeemed Israel from Egyptian slavery (Deut. 15:15). We are enslaved to sin and spiritual death. We are powerless to free ourselves. But the Son of God died to free us from our sins. No man-made god would sacrifice himself for us, but God did this because he is rich in grace. We are forgiven and free. Redemption by Jesus' blood motivates us to not sin since we do not want to profane Jesus' blood. Redemption by lavish grace frees from fear of past sins so we can focus on living for God today.

4. What blessing is described in **1:11**? What does this mean (ASV: "... we were made a heritage...")? In **1:13-14**, how does God mark that he owns us until he does redeem us? What does this look like?

God has claimed us as his heritage (NET: possession). God owns the world, but God places great value on us by saying that his people are his inheritance (Ex. 19:5; Deut. 32:8-9). God has not yet acquired us (1:14), so God has sealed us with the Spirit. We receive the promised Spirit at baptism. Through God's word, the Spirit changes us so that the fruit of righteousness results in us (Acts 2:38; Tit. 3:5; Gal. 5:22-26). As we face trials and temptations while we wait for God to obtain us, the life-change the Spirit brings to our lives assures us that we are God's children (Romans 8). But the life and blessings we have through the Spirit are only a downpayment. The glory awaiting God's inheritance is far greater than we can imagine.

We will return to **verses 6, 12, and 14** to see God's purpose in richly blessing us at the end of our study.

Before Your Spiritual Blessings (Ephesians 2:1-10)

5. Consider **2:1-3**. What was our situation before being adopted? How does this contrast affect you?

Paul wants us to appreciate the blessings of being God's child because we used to be spiritually dead. The rule of our life was to follow Satan like the rest of the world. We obeyed what the desires of the body and mind told us to do. We did not listen to God. We did not think of the spiritual consequences. Paul wants us to appreciate what we have now so we do not return to how we lived before. Notice how this happened. The world tells us to "obey our thirst," but listening to our fleshly minds only got us killed.

6. Consider **2:4-9**. How does Paul describe our current situation? What caused this change? What didn't? We have been made alive. We have been saved. This only happened because 2:4 says, "But God..." We contributed wickedness. But because God was rich in mercy he loved us when we were dead in our trespasses and saved us. This is "not your own doing" and "not a result of works." This change has happened only because of God's grace. God does not save us because we are good moral people. God saved us because we were dead and helpless. We are only saved because of God's infinite goodness.

7. Consider **2:10**. What does God desire to do with our lives now?

God did not make us alive to watch us return to our fleshly lifestyle. God saved us by grace so he could mold us into people who live to do good works for his glory. Our good works after being saved reflect the work God has done in us. We reject past sins because God's grace has melted our hearts of stone. When we help a brother in need that is because God's love is at work in us. We teach the gospel so people can have life. We are pure. We are merciful. We are peacemakers. We reject idols. God has done this.

God's Power in You (Ephesians 3:14-21)

8. Following Paul's example in **3:14-19**, what should we pray for so we might grow to be mature and filled with all the fullness of God? What does this accomplish in **3:19-21**?

First, ask God to strengthen us through his Spirit who lives in us to transform us. Second, ask God to help us know how much Christ loves us so we will have deep roots and be firmly grounded. It takes God-given strength to comprehend the dimensions of Christ's love for us; yet, even with God's strength, Christ's love surpasses knowledge! Let Christ's love be the very thing that holds you together in uncertainty. When we have inner strength and grounding, he who can do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think will be able to work in, through, and for us. Don't forget this passage when you are discouraged and are struggling to have faith in prayer. Our Father shows immeasurable love and power toward his people.

9. Look back over **Ephesians 1-3** and notice why God blesses us (**1:6, 12, 14; 3:10, 21**). Why did God adopt, redeem, and save you? How does this shape the purpose of your identity as God's child?

God adopted and blessed us for the praise of his glorious grace. Everything God has done for his Church is to reveal his manifold wisdom, glory, and love to the world and all the spiritual beings in the heavenly places. We were not created and we were not made to be God's children for small purposes. God adopted and blessed us infinitely so all might know his greatness. Your identity has a new purpose. You have been made God's child so you can live to praise and glorify his name forever.

LESSON 1 APPLICATIONS

You were dead, but now you are a child of the Most High. As a child of the Most High, God has blessed you for his glory. **Remember when you pray:** Christ's love for me takes God-given strength to comprehend. God's power can do exceedingly abundantly above all I ask or think. This blessing is for God's glory. God is glorified by infinitely blessing undeserving people to turn their hearts towards Him. **Worship for God's glory** with your story at heart: I was lost, but now I am found.

Lesson 2: Walk Worthy in Unity (Ephesians 4)

In **Ephesians 1-3** Paul described how the calling of the Christian is to live to the praise of God's glory by receiving every spiritual blessing in Christ. God's wisdom is made known to all physical and spiritual beings by redeeming undeserving people. In **Ephesians 4-6** Paul urges us "to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called." Because God has called us to be to the praise of his glory, there is a certain way we ought to live. We are saved by grace to honor God in purity, not to return to sin. **Ephesians 4** teaches us to have unity with a local church so we can grow into Christ-like maturity.

Walk Worthy in Unity (Ephesians 4:1-6)

1. Read **4:1-3**. What is the first way Paul instructs us to walk worthy in **verse 3**? What does this teach us about the importance of being connected to a local family of believers?

The first key to walking worthy is maintaining unity with one another. Paul's decision to first instruct the Ephesians in unity with other Christians is telling. It's like Paul is saying, "You will fail if you try to walk like God's child without other children of God with you." Sadly, many try to separate Christianity from unity with a local church. This cannot happen. We need other Christians. It is not that we are God's children because we are a part of a local church; we seek unity with believers because we are truly God's children.

2. How does Paul tell us to pursue unity with one another (**4:2-3**)?

We must be humble, gentle, patient, and loving in our interactions with one another. We will make mistakes and have disagreements. Christians must work through these problems with these characteristics at hand. Many think unity happens when we believe the same thing. This is important, but what happens when we sin or have Scriptural disagreements? Some leave for another family. But Paul teaches us that true children of the Father stay to work through these things with gentleness and patience. God has been patient with us - how could we treat our brothers and sisters any differently?

3. Read **4:4-6**. What is the basis for our unity with one another?

Our unity is based upon these seven truths. Unity does not come by simply being patient with one another. We are unified if we are a part of the one body of Christ and if we obey the same Spirit, Lord, and Father. We are also only unified if we also have the same hope, the same baptism, and the same faith. Many struggle to accept God's word here. Some say there are many ways to be baptized or that there are Christians who aren't baptized. Some say it doesn't matter what we have faith in - we just need to have faith. We must flee such relativity. These seven truths are not up for interpretation.

Equipping the Saints (Ephesians 4:7-16)

4. Read **4:7-10**. What did Christ give each of us (**vs. 7-8**)? Why did Christ ascend and do this (**vs. 9-10**)?

As the NLT says, "He has given each one of us a special gift through the generosity of Christ." Many saints do not realize Christ has given them a gift. Christ has gifted each of us so he can fill all things. Verse 16 says that when each part works properly, Christ's body grows and builds itself up in love. Christ's body cannot grow without you. Start thinking about what gift(s) you may have. We'll study this more in lesson 8.

5. What does **4:11-12** say Christ gave his church? What are their overall (**vs. 12**) and specific functions?

Christ gave his church apostles, prophets, evangelists, shepherds, and teachers to equip the saints to do the work of ministry (service) and the of building up the body of Christ. The apostles and prophets were inspired to speak and write God's word. Christ's church is built on their foundation (cf. 2:19-20). Evangelists (preachers) speak the gospel to non-Christians and Christians. Shepherds (elders) spiritually feed and protect souls in their care. Teachers teach God's word in various individual and group situations.

6. Notice 4:13-16. What four goals does Christ give us to grow toward in these verses?

Vs. 13a: Attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of God's Son. We must maintain unity in attitude and in truth, but we are to attain to perfect knowledge of what and who we are to believe in.

Vs. 13b: Mature manhood which measures up to Christ's stature. Regularly ask yourself, "Am I more like Christ than I was last year?" This goal isn't met until we all attain to Christ's stature - help others grow too!

Vs. 14-15: Not children tossed by every wind, but able to speak the truth in love. Trials test us. False teachers use trickery. Let's learn, live, and speak the truth so we aren't tossed by every trial and teaching.

Vs. 16: Each part is equipped and working properly so that the body grows and builds itself up in love.

7. Read Acts 2:42-47. What did the first Christians dedicate themselves to? How can this text help us?

The first Christians devoted themselves to listen to the apostles' teaching together, to pray together, and to remember Christ together in the Lord's Supper on the first day of the week ("breaking of bread"; cf. Matt. 26:26-29; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:17-34). They shared their possessions, time, food, and homes with one another (vs. 44-46). Most importantly, they shared the gospel (vs. 47). We must use them as our example!

The New Life (Ephesians 4:17-32)

8. Read 4:17-19. How does Paul describe Gentiles' minds and hearts (17-18)? How did this happen (19)?

The Gentiles' minds are set on futility. Their understanding is darkened. They are ignorant. They have hardened their hearts against the truth of God, so they are void of lasting purpose. Gentiles are hardened like this because they have become callous. Sin stopped causing them pain, so they gave themselves up to sensuality and eventually became greedy for impurity. This is the result of listening to deceit and grasping after the fleeting pleasures of this world. We must no longer think and walk like the Gentiles do.

9. Read 4:20-24. What 3-step process of transformation must we be taught when we learn Christ?

First, put off your old self. Consider what must be "put off" in your life. Do whatever it takes to put off sin (cf. Matt. 18:8-9). Remember, the sinful desires tempting us are "deceitful" - they promise satisfaction, but never deliver. Second, be renewed in the spirit of your mind. Many people never change because they forget this step. Regularly submit yourself to God's word so the Holy Spirit can continue renewing the way you think. Third, put on the new self. Do not only put off sin, be renewed and put on righteous actions. Then we can be rid of futility and be what God created mankind to be: bearers of his image and likeness.

10. What does Paul tell us to "put off" and "put on" in 4:25-32? What motivations does Paul give?

Vs.	Put Off	Put On	Renewing Motivation
25	Falsehood	Speak the truth with your neighbor	Members of one another
26-27	Letting the sun going down on your anger	Be angry and do not sin	No opportunity for the devil
28	Stealing	Do honest work with your own hands	Share with those in need
29-30	Foul, corrupting, unwholesome talk	Talk that builds up, fits the occasion, and gives grace to those who hear	Do not grieve the Holy Spirit
31-32	Bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, malice	Be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving	God in Christ forgave you

LESSON 2 APPLICATIONS

We must live in a way that honors our calling to glorify God. To do this, we must stop living like Gentiles and start living like God's children. Therefore, we need to be united with a local body of Christians. Together, we can grow to maturity so we aren't destroyed by life's storms or by false teaching. Put off the old self. Let God's word renew your mind. Put on the new self, created after the likeness of God.

Lesson 3: Walk Worthy in Relationships (Ephesians 5-6)

In **Ephesians 1-3** Paul described how Christians are called for God's glory and in **Ephesians 4-6** Paul urges us "to walk in a manner worthy of the calling..." Because God has called us to be to the praise of his glory, there is a certain way we must live. Last time we saw the need for unity with a local church so we can be equipped to serve. As Paul continues to describe the worthy walk, Paul instructs us in **Ephesians 5:1** to imitate God and in **Ephesians 5:21** to submit to one another. From Oprah to modern therapists to Dove Chocolate wrappers, our culture teaches us to live for self. But our text today teaches us to give up ourselves in complete submission to one another. Let's notice why.

Imitate God (Ephesians 5:1-21)

1. Notice **5:1-2**. What does Paul instruct us to do in **verse 1-2**? How can we do this?

Paul instructs us to imitate God. We imitate God when we walk in love. God-like love is not only a feeling, it is something we walk in. If we only have good feelings for one another, our love is not biblical. Our example of love is Christ who "gave himself up for us." Though Christ's example is weighty, joy awaits those who sacrifice self for others' needs. We will love much when we see how much Christ has given us.

2. What unloving actions does Paul command us to avoid in **5:3-4**? To what do these words refer?

It is unloving to practice sexual immorality, impurity, covetousness, and crude joking. Sexual immorality is all sexual contact outside of one's first heterosexual marriage (exceptions: Rom. 7:1-3 and Matt. 19:3-12). Sexual immorality is unloving because it does not honor the other person as a soul in a God-sanctioned marriage. Covetousness is clarified in verse 5 as idolatry. If our treasure is not service to God and his people - we are idolatrous. We cannot sacrificially love others when we worship money, cars, possessions, alcohol, sex, etc. Christians must also put away filthy speech. If we wouldn't say or watch something in Jesus' presence, we shouldn't say it or watch it. Eliminate filthiness by offering thanksgiving to God.

3. What warning does Paul give in **5:5-6**? Why is this warning so important for us to hear today?

Paul wants us to be certain of one thing: the sexually immoral, impure, and idolatrous have no inheritance in God's kingdom. Paul warns us to let no one to deceive us into thinking otherwise. This warning should hit us hard since the world often claims that discipleship and immorality can go together. Many will speak like the serpent who told Eve "You will not surely die," but we must believe God instead.

4. What instructions does Paul give us to prevent us from leaving the light for the darkness in **5:7-17**?

Paul's overall message is that we ought to not just turn from darkness, but run from it. Do not make close partnerships with sinful people (vs. 6-8). Focus, not on sin, but on walk as a child of light by participating in good, right, and true things (vs. 8-9). Pause when you make decisions and ask, "What would please the Lord?" (vs. 10). Do not take part, think about, or even talk about even in the slightest bit of dark, evil living; instead, expose darkness as sin and flee from it (vs. 11-14). Do not be careless, but carefully walk with wisdom (vs. 15, 17). Make the best use of your time. When we become sluggish and do not keep busy with walking as children of light, we begin looking in the wrong places to pass our time (vs. 16).

5. Considering **5:18-20**, what should we and shouldn't we be filled with? How?

We must not be filled with wine but with God's Spirit. We will be filled with God when our hearts and mouths are joined in songs that address one another, praise God, and express thankfulness to God for all his blessings. When we are joined with our brothers and sisters in worship to God we will not want to participate in works of darkness. This is why we must not miss out on worship! We will consider this passage again in a later lesson designed to help us worship in a heart-changing way that pleases God.

Submit to One Another (Ephesians 5:21-6:9)

6. Ephesians 5:21 tells all to submit. What is submission? Should we equate submission with inferiority? *Submission is denying our will and interests for the needs and good of others. Though culture hates the idea of submission, a person who submits their will is not of inferior value. Christ was not weak or inferior because he submitted to the Father and gave his life for us. Rather, Christ's submission to the Father's will and for our good was glorious. It takes great strength and meekness to deny our wants for other's needs.*

7. How are wives told to submit to their husbands in 5:22-24?

First, wives must submit to their husbands as they do to the Lord. We do not obey Christ begrudgingly; therefore, wives should voluntarily and joyfully submit their will. Second, Paul tells them to submit in everything. Wives will not always agree with their husbands. But submission happens when we deny ourselves, not when we agree with everything. Full submission reflects trust in God and exalts Christ's example. Wives should affirm a husband's leadership instead of undermining it. 1 Peter 3:1-2 encourages wives by pointing out how a kind wife who submits her will can wordlessly convert her husband.

8. How does the text instruct husbands with respect to wives who do not submit?

It doesn't. Godly husbands do not enforce submission; they sacrificially love regardless of her actions.

9. Consider 5:25-33. How does Paul instruct husbands to love their wives? What does this mean?

First, they are to love their wives like Christ loved the church. Feel the weight of that. Christ has given us everything when we were undeserving. Husbands must give themselves completely for their wives and make decisions that benefit them even when they aren't living right. Second, they should love their wives like their own bodies. A wife is not empowered to freely give of herself without a husband's sacrificial love. A selfish husband only hurts himself! Recognize the vulnerable situation she is in by committing to submit her will to your leadership. Use that leadership to look out for her spiritual and physical needs.

10. Consider Christ's example in 5:25-27. What should a husband's spiritual leadership look like?

Christ-like husbands take responsibility for the spiritual health of their wives like Christ did for the church. God did not call for Eve in Eden, he called for Adam because he was responsible. Take responsibility.

11. Read 6:1-4. How are children commanded to live? Why? How are fathers commanded to treat children? For parents, see also **Deuteronomy 6:7**, **Proverbs 22:15**, and **Proverbs 23:13-14**.

Children must obey their parents because God expects it and it is in the best interest of a child's life. Disobedient children often fail in many other aspects of life and end up rejecting God. Fathers must not provoke their children by disciplining them and instructing them about the Lord. Godly fathers spank and discipline their children and regularly teach them about God. Sinful fathers don't do these things.

12. Read 6:5-9. How must servants (or employees) act? How must masters (or bosses) act?

Employees must serve like they are serving God. Don't only work hard when people are looking. The Lord will reward their hard labor (vs. 8). Bosses are instructed to do the same. They should look out for their employee's needs and stop threatening because we all have the same heavenly master.

LESSON 3 APPLICATIONS

We must imitate God by walking in love. We cannot do this if we walk in unholy sexual desires, impurity, idolatry, and crude speech. God's wrath will fall on us if our practice is to walk in sin. We will imitate God and be children of light when we flee selfishness and instead submit to others. Wives are respect their husbands. Husbands are to love their wives. Children are to obey their parents. Servants are to obey their masters. Masters must stop their threatening. This submission is not weak, it is Christ-like.

Lesson 4: Grow in God's Word (Matthew 13)

It is surprising how many eventually leave behind God's rich blessings. Why do different people have different reactions to the gospel? Why does the gospel produce life transformation in some, but others are hardly changed? The parable of the sower tells us why some bear fruit and why others do not. The gospel's ability to bear fruit in someone's life depends on the heart in which the gospel is planted. As we study, consider some questions. Which "dirt" am I going to be? What dangers does Jesus warn new Christians about? What is the key to growing and bearing fruit?

The Parable (Matthew 13:1-9)

1. Quickly note: What four soils and results does Jesus identify? What is the meaning of **verse 9**?

Jesus speaks of seed landing on a path, rocky ground, thorny ground, and finally good soil. Only the good soil produces fruit, while the others eventually fail. Jesus essentially says in verse 9, "Listen closely to what I am saying. I am teaching you something very, very important."

The Explanation of Parables (Matthew 13:10-17)

2. How does Jesus describe the spiritual condition of the disciples (**vs. 11-12, 16**)?

Jesus can speak plainly to them because they truly understand him when he speaks to them. They get it.

3. How does Jesus describe the spiritual condition of the crowds (**vs. 13-15**)?

The crowds do not understand what Jesus says. They are like the people of Isaiah's day. They line up to hear Jesus, but nothing happens in their hearts when he speaks. They lack spiritual perception and life change. You can relate to this if you dislike Classic Literature. For me, those books are a snooze. They don't seem important or enjoyable. But this is a serious problem if this happens when reading the Bible!

Jesus will now give the interpretation of the parable which describes **why** some have dull hearts that resist Christ and **why** others do not. This is a time for serious introspection.

The Interpretation of the Parable (Matthew 13:18-23)

4. Consider the heart that the **path** represents (**19**). What is the problem? Consider how **Ephesians 4:18-19** describes the effect of Satan and sin in a similar way.

When sin rules the heart, the word does not sink in and Satan snatches it away before it can take root. Sin is not just sin. Sin is how Satan hardens hearts. Sin creates callouses in the hearts that cause us to lose spiritual perception and understanding. Callouses prevent us from feeling the power of scripture. Christ is less glorious. There is little motivation towards life change. If you have a time where the word never seems to sink in, understand there is probably sin present. Sin must be dethroned before we can grow.

5. Consider the heart that the **rocky ground** represents (**20-21**). Describe what happens with this heart.

This heart receives the Word with joy. Forgiveness, life-purpose, and change sound exciting. But when trials or persecution come, this heart can't handle the heat. Examples: sin that is difficult to overcome, marriage trouble, losing a job, health problems, life changes that family members scoff at, ridicule for being a Christian. Discouragement makes the promises of God sound impossible. This heart gives up.

6. What is the “root” problem with this soil (21)? How can we be better prepared for trials, etc.?

The word does not have deep roots in this person’s heart. There isn’t a deep connection to God. Surface level excitement does not always translate into a deep appreciation for God’s word. This is what happens when the meat of the Bible is not studied and extra opportunities to study with other Christians are avoided. Fight against surface-level faith by digging deep when you study. Take every opportunity to study with other Christians. Challenge yourself. Don’t avoid difficult texts. When trials come, draw encouragement from the word. Trials either destroy faith or produce the strongest Christians.

7. Consider the heart the **thorny ground** represents (22). What happens? How can this happen to us?

The cares of the world and the deceitfulness of riches choke out the word so it cannot be fruitful. Notice: this plant is unfruitful - not dead. This describes many nominal Christians. First, this heart is very busy. There are many cares and commitments. Activities, school functions, hobbies, sports, etc. crowd the life. Second, this heart has big financial goals and material loves. This heart is obsessed with promotions, home upgrades, clothes, dreaming about better cars, and maximized retirement funds. When the word lands on this heart nothing happens because there is no time or room left in the heart to apply the word. We even excuse ourselves from studying, praying, teaching, serving, or worshipping because we believe we are too busy. Busyness is the sign of an unfruitful heart in love with everything but God.

8. How can we prevent becoming the thorny ground?

We shouldn’t fill our life or our kids’ lives with many secular commitments or financial dreams. We aren’t just filling up schedules, we are filling up hearts and making it impossible for the word to find a real place. The excitement of reading the word or serving the weak simply cannot compete with the excitement of pursuing our dreams or engaging in secular activities. Don’t force this juxtaposition! Don’t just lay aside every sin; lay aside every weight (cf. Heb. 12:1). This may require major uprooting.

9. Consider the heart the **good soil** represents (23). What are examples of producing fruit?

Galatians 5:22–23 says the fruit of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.” Growing in knowledge, service, leadership, and evangelism are key ways we exhibit this fruit of life change. Note: Luke 8:15 says the good soil bears fruit “with patience.”

10. Look at **verse 23** closely. What is the key foundation to having good soil that bears much fruit?

Jesus says this heart hears and understands the word. Clearly, this is not just an academic understanding of the word. The Pharisees had academic knowledge. Instead, there needs to be real spiritual perception and understanding when the word is heard or read. We also must not dismiss inconvenient truths.

11. What practical steps can you take to help you understand and bear fruit when you hear God’s word?

Our study of the hardened path reminded us to repent of sin before we study to prevent our hearts being hardened. The rocky soil taught us to pursue deeper study and deeper understandings of God to prevent being destroyed by trials. The thorny soil taught us to set aside passions and cares so we can adopt the life-purpose and desires the Word teaches us. Here are other practical tips: silence the phone, set aside a regular study time, take notes, share what you learn, and participate in Bible studies. Never leave study without understanding how your new knowledge changes your life. Hard hearts don’t apply Scripture.

LESSON 4 APPLICATIONS

I cannot grow if I am not deeply connected to God’s word. Sin hardens my heart from understanding and applying the word. Trials and persecution will wreck my faith if I do not have deep roots in God’s word. Material concerns and financial dreams will fill my heart and make fruitfulness impossible. I must pursue understanding and personal application when I read the word in order to grow and bear fruit in Christ.

Lesson 5: Grow in Prayer

Prayer is one of the greatest assets Christians have. Because of Christ's cleansing blood, when we pray we have the opportunity to speak to, worship, and petition God who created the universe. However, prayer is not natural for us. Unfortunately, mankind usually worships and relies on self. But Scripture gives us examples and direct teaching to help us learn to pray. Prayer is not a good work that saves us, but Christians soon learn that growth and faithfulness are not possible without this key form of communication with our Father in Heaven. Let's learn about this key component of being God's child.

Understanding God

1. We need to know the power and love of God when we pray. What does **Ephesians 3:20** teach us about God's power? Why is this helpful to know?

The God we speak to is able to do "exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think" (NKJV). Paul says we cannot even comprehend the power of our God. This is helpful to know when we pray, especially when we struggle fathoming God's ability to overcome our difficulties. God is able to overcome our problems in ways that are literally unimaginable to the human mind.

2. How does **Matthew 7:7-11** tell us God views our relationship? Why is this helpful to know?

God desires to give us what we ask just as a father desires to give good things to his children. Furthermore, our heavenly Father is far kinder than even the best earthly fathers. Our prayers are not annoying to God and God is not tired of using his power to bless us. This is a perspective adopted from pagan religions. Remember, just as fathers give with wisdom, God gives with divine wisdom and knows what is best for us. Sometimes we do not receive what we desire because God gives what is best for us.

3. How can the description of Jesus in **Hebrews 4:14-16** be helpful for our faith and prayers?

Whether we are struggling with sin and need grace or are battling trials and need God's power, we can easily doubt God understands our pain. But the Hebrew writer says Jesus Christ is our high priest who mediates our prayers. Jesus has experienced even more pain than us. Jesus has been tempted just as we have been. When you doubt, recognize that Jesus understands and sympathizes with our weaknesses.

Warnings about Prayer

4. Before we consider positive admonitions about prayer, let's consider some of the Bible's warnings. Consider **James 1:5-8**. What warning does James give about prayer?

James warns that we should not ask anything of God with doubting in our heart for we will not receive anything when we doubt. James says we are double-minded and unstable if we pray without faith. This is a legitimate accusation. Only an unstable person asks God without trusting him to help!

5. What warning about prayer are we given in **James 4:1-4**?

James wrote to people who were fighting and bickering among one another because they had sinful desires and passions that caused them to be envious and quarrelsome people. Unfortunately, their cravings and passions became the subject of their prayers to God. It is not wrong to ask God to take care of our needs. But we must not have idolatry in our heart or ask God to give us more of our idol!

6. What warnings about prayer did Jesus give in **Matthew 6:5-8**?

Many pray to get attention from others. True disciples only care to be heard by God so they pray in secret. Some pray long prayers to be heard by God. Longer prayers do not cause us to be heard by God, so disciples should not vainly repeat themselves as they pray.

How Should We Pray?

7. Consider Jesus' example prayer in **Matthew 6:9-13**. What is the contrast between **verses 9-10** and **verses 11-13**? What ways is Jesus' prayer helpful for your learning?

Jesus' three requests in verses 9-10 focus on the Father before he makes three personal requests in verses 11-13. In prayer our primary desire must be for God's glory to be seen and for his will to be done. If our personal requests do not align with God's will, we still desire God's will. This prayer helps me learn in a couple ways. Jesus' prayer is short and spoken with simple words. Even the shortest and simplest of prayers are heard by our Father. Except for his request for daily bread, Jesus' personal requests focus on spiritual health. We should request physical provisions, but we must not neglect praying for our souls.

8. How is **James 5:15-18** helpful to your understanding of the power of prayer?

The prayer of a righteous person has great power. This reminds me to stay out of sin and to pray with faith. If Elijah was a man just like we are and his prayer moved God to stop and start rain, we have access to great power when we pray with righteousness and selflessness. We must not pray for our passions (cf. James 4:1-4), but this passage gives us confidence can God hear, heal, and provide in great measures.

9. How does **Philippians 4:6-7** teach us to handle the temptation to be overcome by anxiety?

Instead of bathing our minds in sinful worry, Paul commands us to not be anxious about anything by making our requests known to God in prayer. We will find great internal peace if we will let go and let God take care of our needs by praying to him in full faith. Matthew 6:19-34 is also helpful for anxiety.

10. How does the parable in **Luke 18:1-8** teach us to pray?

This ruthless judge who did not fear God or respect man gave justice to the woman because of her annoying persistence. We are not speaking to a God who is annoyed by us but longs to hear our supplications and longs to bless us when we put faith in him. How much more should we put all our faith in our loving God by persistently approaching his throne with our requests!

11. How does the parable in **Luke 18:9-14** teach us to pray?

We need to recognize who we are and who God is before we pray. We are his creation. Though he loves us, we are small and sinful. God is high, holy, and mighty. We need to pray to him with respect and humility. We must not lift ourselves up in prayer but instead bear our lowly soul to him. We should make requests to God based on his goodness and faithfulness instead of our righteousness.

12. After an irrevocable law had been signed that condemned to death any who prayed to God, how did Daniel respond in **Daniel 6:10**? How does Daniel's example teach you about prayer?

First, it would be a good goal for us to pray with regularity as Daniel did. Many set aside regular times to pray so they do not forget. Second, the fact that Daniel was willing to pray regularly when he knew he would be thrown into the lion's den for doing so speaks to how valuable prayer should be to God's children. We should value prayer so much that we would die to continue to do it.

LESSON 5 APPLICATIONS

Throughout Scripture God pleads with his children to rely on him instead of their own strength. Our greatest sin is often self-reliance. We cannot grow if we are not deeply connected to God in prayer. Pray for your spiritual growth today. Pray understanding God's unfathomable power, fatherly love, and sympathetic understanding. Do not pray with doubting, idolatrous lust, or for attention from man. Pray with simplicity focusing on God's glory, your spiritual needs, and your physical needs. Pray with faith, persistence, humility, and regularity. Hold your privilege to pray as infinitely valuable.

Lesson 6: Grow in Purposeful Suffering

One of the biggest killers of spiritual growth is also the greatest cause of growth. The problem of suffering in the life of Christians is deeply emotional and should not be taken lightly. People who believe in God's undeniable existence are at times so troubled by suffering that they give up trust in God. That some would give up trusting an all-powerful God they know to exist is a testament to the depth of pain Christians can experience. Think about how real this problem is as you consider questions many pose. "God is all-powerful and all-loving. Why am I still sick? Why has my family suffered? Why have we struggled with financial troubles? Why am I being persecuted?" This lesson is designed to correct attitudes in suffering, understand the causes of suffering, and adopt God's purposes for our suffering.

Correcting Our Attitude

1. Consider the truths in **Job 1:21**. What is wrong with demanding God's blessings?

We were born naked and we will die naked. Anything good that happens to us is a blessing God never promised to give us. The fact that we are still alive today is a generous blessing. God never promised health or long life. God never promised prosperity. God didn't promise we would have a spouse or children. If we have ever experienced these things for one minute that is beyond what God has promised. God gives good gifts, but he is not a genie here to simply fulfill our desires.

2. Consider Paul's words in **Romans 3:23** and **6:23**. Why is it wrong to think we deserve God's blessings?

We are all sinners and so we do not deserve God's blessings. We should stop speaking of what we deserve. We do not deserve to have our health, a better job, a nicer car, a spouse, or anything. We do not deserve life, liberty, or the pursuit of happiness. The only thing we as sinners deserve is eternal suffering.

Understanding the Causes of Suffering

Before we find purpose in suffering, consider how the Bible points to three general causes of suffering.

3. Who all is responsible for Job's trial in **Job 1:6-12**?

Both Satan and God are involved, but for different purposes. Satan wants to prove that Job only serves God because God blesses and protects him from all harm. He thinks Job will cave in once God allows him to suffer. However, God takes responsibility for Job's suffering (Job 2:3). He wants to prove just the opposite: that Job serves him regardless of his blessings or suffering. God uses this occasion to demonstrate Job's faithfulness and to make him a better man.

4. Consider **Proverbs 1:15-19** and **1:29-33**. What cause of suffering does Proverbs point to?

Proverbs points to how sin and a lack of wisdom causes suffering. Either we suffer because of our own sin or because of others' sins against us. God's law teaches us wisdom so we will not experience the pain of sin and instead use our free will to choose life in God's pure character. But mankind has free will and can choose to ignore God's wisdom. We cannot have free will and a pain-free world. Our sinful choices cause painful consequences to ourselves and to those around us.

5. Consider **Ecclesiastes 9:11-12**. What cause of suffering does Ecclesiastes point to?

Time and chance happen to all people. Sometimes we are just in the wrong place at the wrong time. Many people say, "Everything happens for a reason." No, sometimes terrible things happen because terrible things happen in this fallen world.

Understanding God's Purposes in Suffering

Instead of teaching us to dwell on the causes of suffering, the principle of **John 9:1-4** teaches us to focus on how suffering can be used for God's glory. Consider a few ways the Bible gives purpose to pain.

6. What purposes do **James 1:2-4** and **Romans 5:2-5** teach us to focus on in suffering?

The fruit of endurance and steadfastness cannot be produced in our life without enduring suffering. Our parents taught us that difficulty "builds character." They were right! When we endure suffering with God's wisdom and grace at hand a more steadfast and faithful character is built in us that will not faint in difficulty. Romans 5:4-5 also teaches that suffering produces hope. How else can we put all our hope for the future in our pain-free heavenly home except by turmoil? We cannot learn to desire what is complete and glorious without first recognizing the corruption and pain in this world.

7. What opportunities does **2 Corinthians 1:3-7** say we have in our afflictions?

First, 2 Corinthians 1:5 says our afflictions give us the opportunity to share in Christ's sufferings. Jesus taught his apostles in John 15:18-20 to expect to be persecuted because he was persecuted. Therefore, we have the opportunity to endure as Christ did when we are persecuted. Second, we notice in 2 Corinthians 1:3-4 and 1:6-7 that when we suffer and experience God's comfort, this gives us the opportunity to comfort others in their affliction. If we never have any difficulties, how can we realistically comfort believers and non-believers who need answers in trials? When we suffer and are comforted by God in answered prayer, we can teach people by our experience of the trust they can place in God.

8. What purpose does Paul say his terrible affliction served in **2 Corinthians 1:8-10**?

Paul - the apostle who endured much, had miraculous spiritual gifts, and saw the resurrected Lord - needed to learn to trust God more. It is not that God sent troubles upon Paul so he could learn this. Rather, Paul used the opportunity to cast all his cares on God who raises the dead. One day Paul would die and he needed to be able to trust God's promise to resurrect believers on his own deathbed. We need this too. But we will not trust God on our deathbeds if we have not learned to place all our hope in God's saving power by experiencing times of desperate need with God at our side.

9. What two purposes did the Thessalonians accomplish in their persecution in **1 Thessalonians 1:6-10**?

The new Thessalonian believers received the gospel in persecution, yet they remained steadfast. This first caused them to become an example to believers in other regions. When we are faithful to God in difficulty it encourages other Christians to do the same. Second, this caused the gospel to sound forth to unbelievers. When we are faithful to God and have hope in trials, it causes unbelievers to seek the God who strengthens us.

10. Read **1 Peter 1:6-8**. What is the result when our faithfulness remains strong when tested by trials?

Peter says that when Christians rejoice in their secure salvation in the midst of grievous trials, it allows our faith to be tested. When our rejoicing faith passes the test of trials, the result is praise, glory, and honor to Jesus Christ. If we are like Job and we refuse to give up on our God when Satan is trying to destroy our faith through trials and persecution, God is glorified. Our faithfulness declares how valuable God is to us.

LESSON 6 APPLICATIONS

Our faith and joy can either grow or be destroyed in trials and persecution. Lean on God and your church family for comfort in your pain. Suffering does not prevent God's purposes for you from being accomplished. Correct selfish attitudes that demand more of God's blessings than what he has promised. Let us not be distracted by **why** suffering happens, but **how** we can use suffering for God's glory.

Lesson 7: Find Your Place (Romans 12; 1 Corinthians 12)

Many 21st century churches run like businesses. Churches are marketed like products and hungry souls run from service to service seeking the church that makes them happy. They are the consumers, right? But this is not what God intended when he established the first church in Jerusalem, and it is not what he intends today. Glorifying God's name on earth isn't a "business" for paid professionals. It is the eternal purpose for which all God's people were created (cf. Ephesians 3:8-11). There are no providers and consumers. A church is a family. Each individual has unique gifts and plays a part. Where do you fit in?

A Living Sacrifice (Romans 12:1-2)

1. Since God gives us mercy, what does Paul tell us to do with our bodies? What does this mean? **(12:1)**
In Christ we are saved by grace and there is no condemnation. Because God has given us this free gift, Paul tells us to present our bodies as living sacrifices to God. A sacrifice is something of high value voluntarily given away. Since God saved your life, he asks you to voluntarily give him your body. Our minds, mouths, hands, feet, and entire bodies are tools God can use to do good work for his glory.

2. How can we present our bodies as living sacrifices to God? How can we practically do this? **(12:2)**
It is not natural to become a living sacrifice because worldly people, music, movies, and shows teach us to think selfishly. Selfishness is natural. So we have to stop listening to and conforming to these worldly influences. But when we replace these influences with reading, understanding, and applying God's word, our minds will be renewed and our thoughts will progressively transform from selfishness to sacrifice.

Many Gifts from Grace (Romans 12:3-6; 1 Corinthians 12:14-22)

3. Notice Romans **12:3**. How does Paul teach us to think of ourselves?
We should be sober/moderate as we consider our gifts. This is not easy. Some neglect sober judgment by thinking too high of themselves. Others neglect sober judgment by thinking too low of themselves as if they have no place! You aren't more important than others, but your gifts are vital for this church.

4. How does Paul describe the local church in **Romans 12:4-5**?
Paul describes the church as a body. Each person is a different member of the body, so each member has a different function that causes the whole body of Christ to function in unison.

5. What does Paul say the source of our differing gifts and functions is in **Romans 12:6**?
Grace. We are gifted because God's grace transforms us. Though we should strive to grow in our gifts, a gift is not something we earn. God gives gifts and we should use them for his glory, not our own.

6. What way of thinking does Paul warn against in **1 Corinthians 12:14-20**? How does he correct this?
Sometimes members of the body become envious of the roles others play and think little of their own gifts. Paul corrects this by reminding us that a body must have many working parts, or else it does not work at all. If everyone spends the majority of their time shepherding, who will organize efforts in service?

7. What way of thinking does Paul warn against in **1 Corinthians 12:21-22**? How does he correct this?
Some members become prideful and diminish the usefulness of others' gifts. But this would never happen in the human body. Every part is essential to the functioning of the whole body. In fact, Paul says in verse 22 that the parts that seem weaker are actually indispensable. Our visible mouths are not more important than our invisible lungs. Encourage those with less noticeable gifts. They are indispensable. Preachers are not more important than quiet and generous contributors or sacrificial servants.

Find Your Place (Romans 12:6-8)

8. When Paul encourages the Romans to use their gifts, what 7 gifts does he list (12:6-8)?

Though the miraculous gift of prophecy is not given today (see 1 Corinthians 13:8-10 and Acts 8:18 for questions), each person ought to find themselves in at least one of the remaining 6 categories. The gifts that differ according to the grace given to us are: serving, teaching, exhorting (encouraging), contributing, leading, and being merciful.

Consider some practical examples of each gift (this list is very limited, not exhaustive).

<u>Serving</u>	<u>Teaching</u>	<u>Exhorting</u>	<u>Contributing</u>	<u>Leading</u>	<u>Showing Mercy</u>
Babysit and care for children	Teaching Bible studies for children	Encouraging guests of our congregation	Generous weekly contributions	Shepherding (teach, guide, correct)	Constantly make peace in church
Care for elderly (cleaning, cooking, rides)	Teaching Bible studies for adults	Connect to new Christians (meals, studies)	Personally giving to needy saints	Servants [deacons] (lead serving church)	Pursue and encourage weak Christians
Upkeep of worship facilities	Evangelism (teaching non-Christians)	Cards, calls, visits to weak/sick Christians	Fund Christian adoptions	Evangelist (preach, teach non-Christians)	Befriend/help overlooked people
Cook food for busy/needy families	Teaching personal Bible studies	Praising and sharpening hard workers	Clothing/sheltering needy	Lead worship, talks, classes, various projects	Ask non-Christians for Bible studies

9. Consider your strengths, what you enjoy doing, and what others have told you you are good at. What gift(s) do you have? What ways can you put your gift(s) into action?

10. List name(s) of people in your local congregation who have these gifts and can helpfully mentor you.

LESSON 8 APPLICATIONS

Ephesians 4:15-16, *"Instead, we will speak the truth in love, growing in every way more and more like Christ, who is the head of his body, the church. He makes the whole body fit together perfectly. As each part does its own special work, it helps the other parts grow, so that the whole body is healthy and growing and full of love."*

God knew what he was doing when he designed Christ's body. Christ as the head gives direction and we are the parts gifted to function in unique ways. When we unite to serve, teach, exhort, contribute, lead, and show mercy to one another and the world, we glorify Christ. We never know our gifts until we try. It may take time to find your place. Satan will wage war against you because he wants you to be useless. If you struggle, it is not a sign you should give up. All of God's children are useful. Your gifts and roles may change as you grow and as the needs around you change. When you find your gifts, GROW in those gifts! Muscles become powerful with disciplined exercise. Gifts are the same. Grow and don't stop.

What more can we study with you to help you grow in your gifts and in your knowledge of the Bible?