

Discussion answers and suggestions

Section One, Lesson One – Christian growth begins with spiritual life.

1. Answer: Paul describes people who are spiritually dead (1) as dead in trespasses and sins (Eph. 2:1), (2) as walking according to the course of this world and the prince of the power of the air (v. 2), (3) as children of disobedience who are influenced by Satan (v. 2), (4) as everyone (“also we all,” v. 3), controlled by the lusts and desires of the flesh and mind (v. 3), (5) in possession of a nature that produces God’s wrath (v. 3). Suggestion: It is important to emphasize that all begin spiritually dead in trespasses and sins, and that this condition is reinforced by both worldly and satanic influence from without and corrupted nature within. None of us are “spiritual people” until we are made alive spiritually. We begin as spiritually dead people.
2. Answer: Only God can make a spiritually dead person alive (v. 4). He does it because He is rich in mercy (v. 4), because He loved us as a sinner (v. 4), because Jesus provided a way through His death on the cross for our sins and His resurrection (vv. 5-6), and because He desires to showcase the riches of His grace and kindness for all of eternity (v. 7). Suggestion: It is important to point out that God never makes anyone spiritually alive because of that person’s merit. He never does so because of some goodness He sees in the sinner.
3. Answer: Gifts are gracious—they are offered freely without charge. They are received by faith, not earned by works (vv. 8-9). Suggestion: It is important to understand that we cannot work to be spiritually alive. We may have to work to grow spiritually, but we cannot work to be spiritually alive. The opposite of working is believing. We must believe the gospel and receive by faith the gift of salvation.
4. Answer: The spiritually alive life will produce spiritual growth and fruitfulness in good works as ordained by God (v. 10). A good work without reference to God’s ordinance can be performed by a spiritually dead person, but that work is ultimately not good in the sense meant by v. 10, “good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.” The parable of the sower indicates that though there may be different levels of fruitfulness, true spiritual life will bring forth lasting fruit (Matt. 13:1-23). Suggestion: Stress that salvation not only gives us eternal life, it also makes us spiritually alive and fruitful. It changes how we live, not just our destiny.
5. Suggestion: Give participants opportunity to share their salvation testimony and how change came to their lives.

Section One, Lesson Two – The goal of Christian growth is Christlikeness.

1. Answer: The goal of salvation according to Romans 8:29 is that the sinner might be conformed to the image of God's Son, Jesus Christ, so that He might become the Firstborn among many brothers. Our spiritual growth makes us like Christ, readies us to be with Christ, and causes us to bring Him glory as God's Firstborn among many brethren. Suggestion: Encourage the student to see Christian growth from God's perspective—the eternal aspect of what God is achieving in us. It is always helpful to any patient undergoing treatment to know what the doctor is doing and why.
2. Answer: John called it being like Him, the One who shall appear at the rapture, Jesus Christ. Seeing Him as He is will cause us to be like Him. Having this hope and understanding this goal has an important effect on the life of a believer: self-purification that is measured by the purity of Christ. Suggestion: Imagine being treated for a terrible disease again, but also having the assurance that the treatment you are undergoing has a 100% success rate. We would be enthusiastic about that process. John promises, "When we see Him, we shall be like Him." He also promises that this goal causes us to want to purify ourselves like Christ is pure, to undergo the arduous process of the necessary treatment as soon as and as quickly as possible.
3. Answer: One opposite of conformity to the image of God's Son is conformity to the world. A lot of what the NT calls *the world* in this sense is a problem we find on the inside of us, not just on the outside of us (1 John 2:15-17). The process of Christian growth is described as surrender of our bodies to do God's will and renewal of our minds to transform our character and life. Suggestion: Stress that growth into Christlikeness is a process. The process should mean that I am a bit more like Jesus today than I was yesterday.
4. Paul spoke of giving Christ preeminence or first-place in everything (Col. 1:18). It is the nature of Christian growth that it happens only when we adopt the goal of becoming more like Christ each day. If we are living life without aiming at that goal, we will be certain not to hit it. Establishing that goal each day means spending time with the Lord surrendering our bodies to do His will and transforming our lives by renewing our minds in His truth.

Section One, Lesson Three – Freedom from sin helps us grow.

1. Answer: The end result of this work of salvation in our hearts is that we from now on should not serve (like a slave) sin because we are now freed from sin—no longer in bondage to it. Suggestion: The student of Christian growth will undoubtedly struggle with Paul's declaration that we are dead to sin. They will also have difficulty with the idea that our old man was crucified with Christ (v. 6). Yet these are the clear declarations of the Word of God and very important truths to our spiritual growth. What they mean is that our salvation in Christ includes redemption from bondage to sin. We no longer have to sin the way a slave has to serve its master. We are free in the sense that we can choose whether or not to sin.
2. Answer: The old man before Christ no longer exists in the case of each believer. That was a person who was the slave of sin. Kevin Hobi, the slave of sin, has died a violent death – crucifixion. All this was made possible by the crucifixion of Christ. So, in this context, *old man* does not refer to our sinful nature; it refers to our existence without Christ as the slave of sin. Our death to sin does not mean we are incapable of sinning; it means that we are always capable of not sinning. Suggestion: Verse 11 tells believers to reckon these things to be true of themselves; believers need to come to grips with the power not to sin that they have in their redemption from sin in Christ.
3. Answer: The effect should be threefold: (1) we should expect to be able to live righteously with the resources we have in Christ rather than expect that we will have to live sinfully (i.e., our expectations should be raised); (2) we should understand that we are without excuse ("well, nobody's perfect" simply does not work here); (3) we should consciously yield our bodies as instruments (weapons) of righteousness each day (v. 13). Suggestion: Ask the group how high their expectation for righteous living is. It can be hard to imagine life without some of our sinful practices, but that is what normal Christianity is. Ask whether they are tempted to offer excuses when they sin. Ask whether they have ever consciously yielded their body to God for the purpose of righteous living. These are all keys to healthy spiritual growth.
4. Answer: Eternal life is obtained by receiving a gracious gift by faith. It is not earned through works. We have earned death because of our sin. We obtain eternal life on the basis of the work of Christ as a free gift. Once obtained, that eternal life is also new life. Suggestion: Some professing believers claim to have eternal life, but it is clear that they do not have newness of life. The problem with that situation is that these are the same life. If you do not have the one (newness of life), you do not have the other (eternal life). For this reason, we should not expect to continue in sin that grace may abound. Grace frees us from our sins (Titus 2:11-15).

Section One, Lesson Four – Freedom from the law helps us grow.

1. Answer: True obedience comes “from the heart,” so it starts in the heart (v. 17); it is measured by a form or pattern of teaching or doctrine (v. 17); its opposites are uncleanness (impurity) and iniquity (literally *lawlessness*, v. 19); and its result is holiness (vv. 19, 22), meaning progressive sanctification or Christian growth into the image of Christ. Suggestion: Point out that so often believers like to talk about a choice between slavery to the law or freedom from it. Paul clarifies that our choice is really between slavery to sin and slavery to God. Slavery to God calls for obedience that is measured by doctrine, and that doctrine is found in God’s law (see Eph. 6:1-3, where believer-children are commanded to obey God’s law to obey their parents).
2. Answer: What is new in the life of a widow is not that the authority of the law in her life has passed away. Clearly, she is free to marry another man only because God’s law says she is free to do so. For the same reason, it might be noted that she is not free to be married to another woman, or to two other men. What has changed is the way the law applies to this woman in view of the change in her status. She is still under the authority of the law, but that authority applies to her in a different way now. Suggestion: Emphasize that freedom from the law for the believer does not mean that the law no longer has authority over the believer. Lawlessness is still a real problem to be avoided (translated *iniquity* in 6:19). What freedom from the law means for the believer is that the authority of the law now applies to him differently than it does the unbeliever, because the believer’s status has changed. Dead and risen in Christ, the justified believer is one who can never again be legally condemned before the law of God (8:1). This means that when and if we sin, that sin can no longer use the law of God to destroy us as it once did (7:8-11). Freedom from the law’s condemnation means that our sin has a certain impotence now. We always have the resources we need in Christ to make it right, and we will never experience the condemnation of the law our sin deserves. Christ experienced that already for us.
3. Answer: The righteousness of God’s law should be fulfilled in us (Rom. 8:4). Our lives should be the kind of lives that obey God’s laws—lives that are subject to God’s law (Rom. 8:7). This is the way we please God (Rom. 8:8). Suggestion: Give assurance that once God’s law is written upon our hearts, we have the capacity to delight in God’s law (Rom. 7:22). Delighting in God’s law should find us meditating in it day and night (Psalm 1).
4. Answer: We fulfill the righteousness of God’s law, obey God’s law, please God and delight in God’s law, only by the power of God’s Spirit in our lives (Rom. 7:6, 8:1-2, 4-6). More will be said about the importance of the Holy Spirit to our Christian growth in the next lesson. Suggestion: Challenge students to ponder whether or not they truly delight in God’s law because it is written upon their hearts. If not, it may not be written there, or the problem may be that we are walking in the impotence of the flesh rather than in the power of God’s Spirit (7:18, 5-6). Delighting in God’s law goes hand-in-hand with meditating in God’s law (Ps. 1:2), because that is the tool God’s Spirit uses to empower our walk.

Section One, Lesson Five – The Holy Spirit is critical to our Christian growth.

1. Answer: The characteristics of a life lived in the flesh include death (Rom. 8:6), enmity against God (8:7), disobedience to the law of God (8:4, 7-8), discord among brothers (Gal. 5:13-15), a catalogue of sins (5:19-21), including pride and envy (5:26). Believers are no longer in the flesh in the sense that something has been added to their existence in the flesh, i.e. we are no longer exclusively in the flesh, for now we are also indwelt by the Holy Spirit (Rom. 8:9). Suggestion: It is important to emphasize that spiritual growth does not come naturally. What comes naturally is to live our lives as though we were in the flesh. It takes the supernatural indwelling ministry of the Holy Spirit to produce spiritual growth into Christlikeness in our lives. Because it is a work of God's Spirit, He deserves the credit for what is accomplished, never our flesh.
2. Answer: The fail-safe antidote against doing what comes naturally and living life in the flesh is to walk in the Spirit (Rom. 8:4, Gal. 5:16). Suggestion: It needs to be stressed that walking in the Spirit is a fail-safe way to avoid living life in the flesh. This is emphasized by Paul with a double-negative grammatical construction (considered a grammatical error in English, but a form of emphasis in Greek) in Gal. 5:16. Paul says literally, "Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not in any way fulfill the lust of the flesh." The power of God's Spirit in our lives can wipe out any fulfillment of the desires of the flesh with which we struggle. We need to understand the magnitude of His power as a resource for spiritual growth in our lives (Eph. 6:10).
3. Answer: **Mind** (Gal. 5:17, Rom. 8:5) – Walking in the Spirit begins with His influence on our mind and desires. This starting point is so critical that Paul describes all of Christian growth as being transformed by the renewal of our minds (Rom. 12:2). How can we give the Holy Spirit greater influence on our minds, our thinking? We can give the world less influence (Ps. 1:1) while spending more time meditating on God's Word (Ps. 1:2). This pursuit for the Holy Spirit's influence on our thinking needs to influence our music choices (Eph. 5:18-19, Col. 3:16). Our local church assembly times play a big role when it comes to inviting this influence of God's Spirit on our minds (Acts 2:41-47). **Mortify** (Gal. 5:7-12, Rom. 8:13) – Walking in the Spirit will involve the end (via execution) of certain activities our bodies once engaged in and certain relationships that can hinder the Spirit's influence over our lives. **Mentor** (Gal. 5:18, Rom. 8:14) – Walking in the Spirit requires being led by Him. The Spirit of God provides leadership to us through His Word and through God-ordained spiritual authority, whose job it is to help us follow His Word. This is the nature of our calling to make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20). **Mercy** (Gal. 5:18, Rom. 8:15-17) – Walking in the Spirit includes the assurance that when we fail, we are not under the condemnation of God's law. We live our lives walking with Him, not with the spirit of fear, like a criminal in a courtroom, but with the spirit of adoption as God's child, like one precious and beloved in His sight. **Ministry** (Gal. 5:6, 13-15) – Walking in the Spirit is going to refocus our lives from self to one another. It will cause us to love one another and minister to one another. Here again, the local church assembly plays an important role (Heb. 10:24-25). Suggestion: Clearly, there are some important specifications for walking in the Spirit. It does not just happen automatically because we are indwelt by Him. It is one thing to live in the Spirit and have His indwelling presence with us, and quite another to walk in the Spirit so as not to fulfill the lusts of the flesh (Gal. 5:25). It will be helpful to start this list of "M's" with that distinction.

Section One, Lesson Six – Christian growth is spiritual warfare

1. Answer: The command is “Be strong.” It is actually a passive command in the original Greek, so one translation puts the command this way: “Be strengthened” (HCSB). The command indicates that our strength is not going to come from our determination to be strong, but rather from our determination to be strengthened by another. That we need the power and might of the Lord to be successful in spiritual warfare indicates that growing in the Lord is going to be difficult, in fact impossible, in our own strength. Suggestions: Two things can be emphasized about the believer’s need for the Lord’s strength to grow spiritually from Eph. 6:10. First, this reference to the Lord’s power and might echoes the promises of Isaiah 40:26-31. There we learn that the Lord’s power and might sustain the wonders of outer space. Then the passage says that this same power and might is accessible to the weak and weary believer. If we wait on the Lord for His power, we can mount up with wings as eagles. Second, the phrase *in the Lord* after the command *be strengthened* is significant. On Saturday at the training conference in North Conway, Pastor Laurence Brown was discussing the command, *Rejoice in the Lord*, and he noted that there is actually no definite article in Greek. The same is true in this command, *Be strong in the Lord*. Pastor Brown pointed out that this is intended to emphasize the qualitative force of the word *Lord*. What this means is that Paul is emphasizing that we must rejoice and be strong in the Lord as a Lord. We must be strengthened by His lordship, His mastery, His authoritative command over our lives. An important key to our being strengthened by our Lord, then, is our willingness to be obedient to His command as our Lord (see 2 Cor. 10:6). Disobedience to Christ’s commands always weakens the Christian soldier. He is the Captain of the host and must be obeyed.
2. Answer: They are described as deceptive (“the wiles” Eph. 6:11), satanic (“of the devil” Eph. 6:11), cruel (“wrestle” Eph. 6:12, ancient Greek wrestling was a gruesome blood sport), nonphysical (“not against flesh and blood” Eph. 6:12; “we do not war after the flesh” 2 Cor. 10:3), in charge of and entrenched in the world (“principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places” Eph. 6:12; “the pulling down of strongholds” 2 Cor. 10:4), and battling for the mind against the knowledge of God (“imaginings, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God . . . every thought” 2 Cor. 10:5). Suggestion: A popular misconception about the nature of the enemy is that our spiritual warfare for Christian growth is not against worldly people, because people are flesh and blood. That conclusion does not comport very well with the example of the battles of our Lord (Matt. 23:29-36; John 8:36-44, 59). In addition, it misunderstands the nature of people. People are more than flesh and blood. They are also spiritual beings. Like our Lord, we may have to do battle with worldly people in Christian warfare. Instead, the truth that this enemy is nonphysical tells us that unlike Israel of old, the Church today is not called to military action. We do not fight bodies, flesh and blood, with physical weapons like the jihad of Islam. Our weapons are not carnal in this sense. The Crusades were not Christian warfare, they were papal perversions of Christian warfare. Ours is a spiritual battle for the mind, our own mind, our children’s minds, our churches’ minds, and the minds of lost sinners, and worldly people are very much our enemy in that battle.
3. Answer: The pieces are the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the greaves of the gospel, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation (victory), and sword of God’s Spirit, His Word. We need the prayer for discernment to wear the belt of truth (Phil. 1:9-11), the prayer of confession of sin to wear the breastplate of righteousness (1 John 1:9), the prayer for boldness to wear the greaves of the gospel (Eph. 6:19-20), the prayer for wisdom in the midst of testing to wear the shield of faith (James 1:2-8), imprecatory prayers against our enemies to wear the helmet of salvation (victory) (Ps. 68:1-3, 19-23), and the prayer for illumination to wear the Sword of the Spirit, God’s Word (Ps. 119:18). Suggestion: It must be emphasized that to be a prayerless believer is to go into the horror of spiritual battle without weaponry. Our success against this enemy will be determined by our commitment to scriptural prayer.

Section One, Lesson Seven: Christian growth has a special focus on the tongue.

1. Answer: The tongue has to be bridled because it is very difficult to control (vv. 1-2, 7-8), because it will affect our lives powerfully (vv. 3-6), and because it is essential for a consistent and faithful witness (vv. 9-12). Suggestions: Have you ever got up in the morning and asked yourself, "What is going to be the most difficult part of being like Christ today?" James would have said that the way we use our tongue should be on that list. Only a perfect man can control it (v. 2), which means no man can (v. 8), except Christ (John 7:46). Sometimes we like to think that we can get away with saying things we should not, but our lives are never immune to the effects of what we say (vv. 3-6). The fountain or fig tree that produces both good product and poisonous product is not to be trusted (vv. 9-12).
2. Answer: The horse and bridle illustration teaches us that we have the ability to use our tongue to restrain evil impulses from within (v. 3). The ship and rudder illustration teaches us that we have the ability to use our tongue to respond well to attacks from without (v. 4). Suggestion: A bit can redirect a horse that wants to move in a certain direction. Within each of us is a force called the flesh, a part of our nature that is in rebellion against God, and that part of us needs to be restrained. When we use our tongues as we should, we give no voice to our flesh. It is called, "biting your tongue." Prov. 10:14, "Wise men store up knowledge, but with the mouth of the foolish, ruin is at hand." A runaway horse unrestrained by bit and bridle can do some damage, and so can the flesh that is not restrained by a tongue that is under control. In regard to the ship and the rudder, note here the competition between the winds of the sea and the will of the ship's captain, literally the one who "guides straight" the ship. If our Captain can control our tongue, He can guide our ship safely through the storms of life that beat down upon us. Most of the things we regret saying are said in response to something someone else has said. That is the wind blowing and the waves crashing, but the Captain of the ship still wants control of the rudder to steer a course through that circumstance. He wants a response that turns away wrath. Prov. 12:6, "The words of the wicked lie in wait for blood, but the mouth of the upright will deliver them." Prov. 15:1, "A soft answer turneth away wrath; but grievous words stir up anger."
3. Answer: The right kind of wisdom is communicated through good works, the wrong kind is not (v. 13); the right kind of wisdom is gentle, the wrong kind is not (vv. 13-16); the right kind of wisdom is first pure, the wrong kind is not (v. 17). Suggestion: What is the question we are always trying to answer when it comes to scouting out wisdom? Who is right and who is wrong? Right? We think we are right and the other guy is wrong, and so case closed, we are the wise one and he is the fool! Did you notice that as James describes these two kinds of wisdom, he never says that one has its facts correct and the other does not. If someone has the wisdom to say, "That carpet is too purple, and I'm leaving this church if we buy that," he may well have his facts correct. It probably is very purple carpet, and no doubt he can make good on his threat to leave. But the question is not, "Who is right and who is wrong?" The question we must ask when scouting out wisdom is "Who is practicing what they preach, who is gentle, who is pure, and who is not?"
4. Answer: Speaking evil of a brother (4:11). Forms of this might include slander, gossip, criticism, loss of temper, and cursing. Suggestion: Speaking evil of a brother is preceded by some other vices in this chapter (pleasing self, vv. 1-3; loving the world, vv. 4-5; and pride, vv. 6-10). These are the vices that will lead to speaking evil of a brother, and they must be avoided if brethren in Christ are to edify each other with their tongues. Ephesians 4:29-5:2 gives us good instruction for the use of our tongue when it comes to our brothers and sisters in Christ. Conclude with the following poem that encourages us to contemplate carefully what we say:

"If all that we say in a single day,
With never a word left out,
Were printed each night in clear black and white
'Twould prove queer reading, no doubt.

And then just suppose, ere our eyes we could close
We must read the whole record through;
Then wouldn't we sigh, and wouldn't we try
A great deal less talking to do?

And I more than half think
That many a kink
Would be smoother in life's tangled thread
If half that we say in a single day were left forever unsaid."

Section Two, Lesson One: We grow by abiding in Christ.

1. Answer: The vine is Christ; the branches are believers; and the husbandman is God the Father. The relationship between the vine and branches (Christ and believers) is an organic one of shared life, identity, work, and purpose. The relationship between the husbandman and the branches (the Father and believers) is one of accountability for the purposes of fruitfulness (pruning, which can include complete and permanent removal from the work of the vine). Suggestion: It is important to not press the metaphor beyond the analogy of Scripture as we interpret it, especially in regard to verse 6. We know from clear passages of Scripture that the believer is eternally secure. God gives us eternal life, and we shall never perish (John 10:27-29). The Bible never teaches that a believer must abide in Christ to produce enough fruit to stay saved. Nor is that Christ's teaching here. Scripture does teach, however, that God disciplines unfruitful believers, even to the point of permanent removal from opportunities to be fruitful in the work of the vine (1 Cor. 11:29-34; Heb. 10:30-31).
2. Answer: Living for self does not at all fit into this picture. Understanding this is where abiding in Christ begins. Suggestion: No branch stands alone on its own. Nor does the vine exist without branches. The metaphor in this regard is very similar to the body metaphor of Christ (the head) and His church (the other body parts). A vine is the sum total of its branches. G. Campbell Morgan explains the significance of this: "If He be the Vine in its entirety, every branch becomes part of Himself. To that first group of men He declared that they were so bound up in His life as to become one with Him, and one with Him in order to the fulfilment of the Divine purpose" [*Great Chapters of the Bible*, p. 198]. Similarly, Andrew Murray suggests: "As neither vine nor branch is anything without the other, so is neither anything except for the other" (*Abide in Christ*, p. 37). Hudson Taylor of the China Inland Mission rejoiced in the same strengthening truth: "As I thought of the Vine and the branches, what light the blessed Spirit poured directly into my soul! How great seemed my mistake in wishing to get the sap, the fullness *out* of Him! I saw not only that Jesus will never leave me, but that I am a member of His body, of His flesh, and of His bones. The vine is not the root merely, but all – root, stem, branches, twigs, leaves, flowers, fruit" (*Hudson Taylor's Spiritual Secret*, pp. 163-164). Consequently, the first step to abiding in Christ is to accept the reality of these relationships, namely that we exist to be part of the vine or body of Christ and to bear fruit for the glory of the husbandman (v. 8). Murray puts it this way: "As the believer enters into his calling as a branch, he sees that he has to forget himself and to live entirely for his fellowmen. To love them, to seek for them, and to save them, Jesus came. For this, every branch on the Vine has to live as much as the Vine itself. It is for fruit, much fruit, that the Father has made us one with Jesus" (p. 38). Accepting this truth is the first step of abiding in Christ. Rejecting it will call for the pruning hook of the Father.
3. Answer: The two practical characteristics of the life abiding in Christ are that such a person prays according to the will of the Lord and enjoys answers to those prayers, and he is constantly influenced by the words of Christ dwelling within. Suggestion: It is important to understand how a focus on the Word of God is critical to our faithfully abiding in Christ. Rejection of God's Word was the problem experienced by those who did not abide in Christ (Jn. 5:38, 8:31). Young men have a special calling to this focus (1 Jn. 2:14). Yet, because of the anointing we have from God's Spirit, this is something we all can and must do (1 Jn. 2:24, 27). Obedience to what we read from God's Word is, of course, a part of this focus (1 Jn. 3:24).
4. Answer: The fruitfulness is best summed up with the word love, especially love for the brethren in Christ. Suggestion: If we are abiding in Christ, we will love our brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Jn. 2:10, 3:14, 15, 17, 4:12, 16). Without abiding in Christ, we can do nothing, especially not this – love our brothers and sisters in Christ (Jn. 15:5). Abiding in Christ, we can bear much fruit, which is much love for brothers and sisters in Him (vv. 12-17), faithfulness through persecution from the world (vv. 18-25), and a bold witness to the truth (vv. 26-27).

Section Two, Lesson Two: We grow by using God's Word.

1. Answer: Psalm 1 lists the counsel of the ungodly, the way of sinners, and the seat of the scornful. 2 Timothy 3 speaks of evil men and seducers, deceiving and being deceived, and 1 Peter 2 mentions the threat of evil speech, which arises out of hearts of malice, guile, hypocrisies, and envying. Suggestion: It is interesting that each of these passages addresses the reality that we often invite influences into our lives that can dampen our desire to spend time with God's Word. Some of the noise of the world will need to be set aside before God's Word can play the role of encouraging Christian growth in us. The wrong kind of music, the wrong kind of entertainment, the wrong use of social media, and the wrong use of the internet can all discourage a proper appetite for the Word of God.
2. Answer: Ps. 1:2 mentions delighting and meditating. 2 Tim. 3:14-17 mentions learning, continuing in what has been learned, becoming convinced, being taught it by others, believing unto the wisdom of salvation, understanding doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction in righteousness, and application toward good works. 1 Pet. 2:2-3 mentions desire and tasting the Lord's graciousness, especially His enabling grace to grow. Suggestion: Invite the class to share a time when God helped them to do more than just read the Bible, a time when the Lord helped them to apply His Word to a specific situation giving them strength and comfort. I was especially blessed that way from Gal. 6:9 recently, "And let us not be weary in well doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not." At times, I get weary and wish for more reaping in this season. That promise encouraged me to serve faithfully and trust God for results "in due season" according to His will. I tasted that the Lord is gracious.
3. Answer: The Bible is a force of Christian growth in our lives because its words are the breath of God. God spoke the universe into existence (Gen. 1:3, "And God said"). When God does something powerfully supernatural, He speaks. Because the Bible is God's inspired Word (2 Tim. 3:16), it is living and powerful (Heb. 4:12) and able to change the life (Ps. 19:7). Suggestion: Now would be a good time to talk about some practical suggestions for using God's Word to grow as a believer. Here is what I would suggest. (1) Designate a daily time as early in the day as possible as your personal Bible reading and prayer time. Do not miss that time. Pray before you read asking God to help you understand. Pray after you have read discussing with the Lord how these truths might be applied to your life that day. (2) Designate as many times a week as you can to read the Bible with your family in family worship. Start with once a week, and see if you can build from there. (3) Determine to attend all the services of our local church unless providentially hindered so that the instruction of God's Word from your pastor-teacher and other teachers of the church can be received. (4) If you are young in the Lord, seek a discipleship Bible study opportunity at least once a month with someone older in the Lord than you; if you are older, seek that with someone younger. Making disciples is why we are here.
4. Answer: The life saturated with the Word of God is promised the stable and fruitful quality of a tree planted by rivers of water (Ps. 1:3), a thoroughgoing furnishing or equipping for every good work (2 Tim. 3:17), and the Lord's enabling grace (1 Pet. 2:3). Simply put, our Christian duty suddenly becomes far more doable when we are nourished by the Bible. Given the strength of our enemy and the weakness of our flesh, there is likely no task so difficult as trying to live the Christian life without God's Word. It is like a plant trying to grow without soil, sun, and water. Suggestion: Perhaps a good way to conclude would be to note how abundantly available the Word of God is to each of us today. Millions of believers all over the world would like to read a Bible but cannot. For ages, past believers had no Bible to read. In our case, the words of Christ are a relevant challenge to our dedication to God's Word, "For unto whomsoever much is given, of him shall be much required" (Luke 12:48). Under the conditions we enjoy, ignorance is even more inexcusable than it was for the Hebrew Christians (Heb. 5:11-14).

Section Two, Lesson Three: We grow through prayer.

1. Answer: Paul prayed for the growth of others in these passages. This indicates that our prayers for one another are critical to our Christian growth. Suggestion: It is important to recognize our need for one another when it comes to growing in the Lord through prayer. Although we find Paul requesting the prayers of others for his own growth (Eph. 6:19-20), we really do not ever find him praying for his own growth. He undoubtedly did pray for personal boldness and the help of God's Spirit in his witness, but he also asked others to pray that way for him, and that is the emphasis of the New Testament. We grow through prayer when we pray together and for one another. Prayer meeting with other believers should be a habit of Christian growth. When we meet for prayer, we should be open about our need for spiritual help through prayer. If Paul needed it, we certainly do as well.
2. Answer: These prayers are packed with significant requests, so choosing one request may be difficult. Here is an effort to summarize each passage into one request:

Eph. 1:15-19, "Grant them a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Christ to know the hope of their calling, the riches of their inheritance in the saints, and the exceeding greatness of God's power toward us who believe."

Eph. 3:14-21, "Grant them spiritual strength that comes through having their minds set on Christ and their hearts filled with an understanding of the unfathomable dimensions of Christ's love for them."

Phil. 1:8-11, "Allow their love to abound more and more in knowledge and all judgment so that they will choose what is excellent, be pure and without offence, and be fruitful to the glory of Christ."

Col. 1:9-12, "Fill them with a knowledge of God's will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding, which will make their walk worthy of Christ, strong, and fruitful as they increase in the knowledge of God."

1 Thess. 3:11-13, "Give them a love for others, especially fellow believers, so that they may have settled hearts and unblameable testimonies in holiness before God in view of Christ's return."

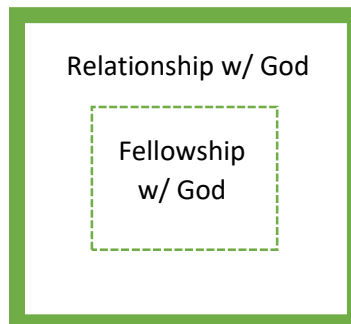
2 Thess. 1:11-12, "May God by grace count them worthy of their calling to accomplish through them His good pleasure and the work of faith to His own glory."

Suggestion: We need to pause and ask ourselves whether our prayers for one another as a church include or parallel these requests. Praying for one another this way is how believers grow. Requesting the prayers of other believers for these kinds of spiritual blessings in our lives is also important.

3. Answer: A thankful love for God's people produces effectual prayers for their spiritual growth. Suggestion: We can imagine praying for a believer out of frustration for how little spiritual growth we have seen in his life. That is not the kind of prayer we find on the lips of the apostle. He begins his prayers for fellow believers by recognizing what they are in Christ. He is thankful for them. He wants to be with them and help them. We are very quick to criticize one another, but if those needs for spiritual growth are to be addressed through prayer, we need to change that disposition and become very quick to pray thankfully for one another. Perhaps our frustrating brother and sister in the Lord have grown so little because our prayers for them have been so poor.
4. Answer: God is able (and willing) to do exceedingly abundantly above all we ask or think according to the power that works within us. Suggestion: That power is the power of God's Spirit, and it is unleashed in our lives and in the lives of our fellow believers through prayer for spiritual growth. If we begin to pray this way for one another, revival will be inevitable and exceedingly abundantly above anything we could have imagined to pray for, greater even than those things that Paul has prayed for! Imagine the potential for good.

Section Two, Lesson Four: We grow through confession of sin.

1. Answer: One difference between fellowship and relationship is that a relationship is more permanent than fellowship. For example, when my kids go off to college, I do not have much fellowship with them, although I still have the same unchanged parent-child relationship with them. Distance can impair fellowship, but not relationship, because they are based on different things. Proximity is a part of the basis of fellowship with my kids, whereas parental rights are the basis of our relationship. In the same way, the sin of a believer can impair his fellowship with the Lord and other believers, but not his relationship with them. The basis of this fellowship is walking in the light and confession of sin, whereas the basis of this relationship is union with Christ, the new birth, and conversion through repentance and faith. Suggestion: I have seen a drawing that can be helpful in illustrating this difference between fellowship with the Lord and relationship with the Lord. Fellowship is the dotted box, but relationship is the solid box. Fellowship can be broken, but relationship cannot. Every believer has the relationship with the God of light, but not necessarily the unbroken fellowship with Him.



2. Answer: It is the nature of our God that makes confession of sin so critical when it comes to fellowshiping with God. "God is light, and in Him is no darkness at all" (1:5). Suggestion: To the degree that we are comfortable with our sinfulness, we do not know our God as He is. He is loving and merciful, and yet He is holy. Just as that holiness required the blood of Christ when it came to establishing our relationship with God (2:2), so also that holiness requires the blood of Christ when it comes to maintaining our fellowship with Him (1:7). This holy fellowship with God is necessary before fellowship between believers can be what it ought to be. The Spirit who is the key to our success as believers is the *Holy Spirit*. Every time we sin, the Holy Spirit is grieved (Eph. 4:30) and quenched (1 Thess. 5:19). Sin must be confessed to know His blessing and power.
3. Answer: The opposite of confession of sin is to say that we have not sinned, so to confess sin is simply to say we have sinned. A lack of confession is hypocrisy (1:6), self-deception (1:8), and the rejection of God's Word (1:10). Confession is essential to our integrity, our truthfulness, and our obedience to God's Word. Suggestion: John makes clear that the goal of all this instruction is that we not sin (2:1), and it is true that the more we confess a sin, the less likely we will be to commit that sin again, but the issue is not really whether or not we will sin. We will sin. The issue is whether or not we will hide or cover up our sin, or confess and forsake it (Prov. 28:13).
4. Answer: Every time we confess our sins, our walk in the light is restored (1:7), our fellowship with the God of light and other believers walking in the light is restored (1:7), our sins are forgiven on the basis of God's faithfulness and justice (1:9), our hearts are cleansed from all sin and unrighteousness by Christ's blood (1:7, 9), and Jesus Christ provides advocacy for us before the Father (2:1). Suggestion: It is good to be reminded that we cannot wear out God's patience when it comes to the confession of sin. Some easily besetting sins will need to be confessed over and over again. This much Christ made plain to Peter, when He instructed Peter that he too should have that kind of patience with others who need forgiveness (70 x 7; Matt. 18:21-22). If the Lord requires that of us for others, He will certainly do that and more for us who often need it too.

Section Two, Lesson Five: We grow through the ordinance of baptism.

1. Answer: The eunuch had been in Jerusalem during the events of Pentecost (8:27, 2:37-41). There he would have witnessed first-hand the work of God's Spirit in the outpouring of revelatory signs and messages and in the repentance and salvation of the lost, even those who had crucified Christ only weeks before. The testimony of thousands of baptisms must have been one of the more powerful evidences of his own need for that saving work. Perhaps one of those testimonies mentioned Isaiah 53, which he happened to have a rare scroll of. What is certain is that after trusting Christ, this man knew immediately that the next step was to be baptized. After his salvation and his baptism, he went on his way rejoicing (v. 39). Suggestion: Emphasize that in the New Testament's examples of baptism, the ordinance follows very closely on the heels of the salvation experience. It does not save, but it gives necessary evidence of salvation. Note that Acts 2:38 can sound like someone must be baptized in addition to repentance to have their sins forgiven and to receive the gift of the Holy Ghost. For two reasons that can be a bit technical, this is not the teaching of the verse. First, note that there are three verbs in the verse – two commands (*repent, be baptized*) and a promise (*you shall receive*). In English, all three of these can appear to be in the 2nd person – *you repent, you be baptized, and you shall receive*. In Greek, however, the command to be baptized is actually in the 3rd person. Our KJV translators recognize this and translate the second command *be baptized every one of you*. What Peter is saying is not that the crowd needed to be baptized to receive the Holy Ghost, but that those of the crowd who repented and received the Holy Ghost needed then to be baptized. We might translate the 3rd person baptism command as parenthetical to Peter's second person address to the crowd as a whole as follows – "You repent (and let each of you who does so be baptized) and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." The second person command *you repent* goes with the second person promise *and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost*. The second issue has to do with the phrase, *be baptized for the remission of sins*. Here the solution is less difficult and involves the meaning of the word *for*. In Greek, it is the same word translated as *at* in Matt. 12:41, "they [Nineveh] repented *at* the preaching of Jonas." So the word can mean *because of* or *in response to* when used this way. Nineveh repented *in response to* the preaching of Jonah, and in Acts 2:38, each one who repents and receives the gift of the Holy Spirit should be baptized *in response to* the forgiveness of sins. The forgiveness of sins comes before baptism and is a result of the repentance, not baptism. Now while it is important to be clear on these technical aspects of the meaning of the verse, it is still important to see how blessed the ordinance of baptism was during the events of the church's birth. It undoubtedly had a huge impact on the Ethiopian official, and after his own baptism he rejoiced greatly.
2. Answer: The truth that baptism symbolizes is our mystical identification or union with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ the moment we are saved. Paul says that we have been baptized into Christ's death (vv. 3-4a). He also says that we have been raised with Him to newness of life (vv. 4b-5). So baptism pictures the death of an old man (me with a life enslaved to the bondage of sin, v. 6), and the resurrection of a new man (me with a life free from bondage to sin, v. 7). Suggestion: It is interesting that Paul makes these references to the baptism of these believers while answering the question, "Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound?" (v. 1). It is as though our baptism experience is an important and needed reminder for us as to why it is we should have victory over sin rather than continuance in it. Believers who are not baptized have no such remembrance.
3. Answer: We all know true believers who have not been baptized since trusting Christ. There seems to be no such examples of this in the New Testament. Paul spoke of Christians as "all of us who have been baptized into [or in the name of] Christ Jesus" in Rom. 6:1. The Acts account shows that all who received the gospel by faith and were saved were then baptized prior to being added to the church (Acts 2:41). There are many reasons why this difference hinders our work for Christ today. Some refuse baptism simply for fear of water; some for fear of other aspects of the ordinance; others because they were baptized as infants; still others because they just do not think it that important. I was a true believer for a number of years prior to being baptized for some of these reasons. But the Great Commission (Matt. 28:19-20) does teach us that this state of affairs should be a concern for all of us. Baptism is the first step of making a disciple, the first command of the Lord we teach the nations as we disciple them. If some persist unbaptized, that is a concern for the dedicated disciple-maker, not just the pastor. Suggestion: What can each of us do to encourage someone we know that needs to be baptized to take this first step of obedience? What would a greater willingness to be baptized do for our church's work for Christ?

Section Two, Lesson Six: We grow through the ordinance of the Lord's Table.

1. Answer: In each case division was the problem. In the case of the disciples in the upper room, a question about who might betray the Lord led to an argument about who was going to be greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Luke 22:21-27). In the case of Corinth, the accompanying love feast became a selfish and raucous party of sorts (1 Cor. 11:16-22). We are to avoid these pitfalls by seeking to be servants rather than kings (Luke 22:25-27), and by seeking to treat what is holy with reverence and respect (1 Cor. 11:27, 29). Suggestion: We need to ask ourselves whether a divisive spirit hinders our celebration of the Lord's Table from time to time. Do we find ourselves wondering why it is taking so long, how long the message is going to be afterwards, or why do we have to do it this way? That spirit is the same royal spirit that infected the disciples. We need servants' hearts at the Lord's Table. Also, we must conduct the ordinance with great reverence and godly fear. This is the significance of discerning the Lord's body so as to not be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord (cp. Heb. 10:29). For this reason, we need to take care to "fence the Table," i.e., to explain to those present who should partake and who should not, and for what reasons.
2. Answer: The significance of the contrast is that it makes clear that for Paul, the Lord's Table is an ordinance of the local church, not the home (see also v. 34). The home is for the purpose of eating and drinking and socializing, says Paul. That can be done just fine at home, but the Lord's Table is done at church (not a building, but a covenanted assembly of believers as defined in the New Testament). Suggestion: Whatever a believer does, he must not despise the church of God. *Despise* here has the idea of looking down upon or treating with contempt. God has indeed chosen the despised things of this world to do His work (1 Cor. 1:28-29). Though often the despised, may we never become the despisers.
3. Answer: The celebration of the Lord's Table should make us more like Christ by helping us to remember what He did for us (vv. 24-25), by causing us to proclaim the Lord's death as a personal testimony of our own (v. 26), by reminding us that we shall eat of the Table with Him someday when He comes again (v. 26; Luke 22:29-30), and by causing us to honestly examine ourselves in confession of sin with fear and trembling (vv. 27-32; Phil. 2:12-16). Suggestion: Spend some time taking testimonies of what it means to each personally to partake of the Lord's Table each month.

Section Two, Lesson Seven: We grow through the local church's ministry.

1. Answer: In each passage the connection between heaven and earth has to do with binding on earth what has been bound in heaven. In other words, it is God's plan to use the church to bring heaven's disciple down to earth. In chapter 16, this authority is said to reside in Peter as an inspired apostle, meaning that apostolic revelation or the Scripture is the authority of heaven on earth. It is the church's job to be built on that foundational authorization. In chapter 18, it is the local congregation of believers gathered as a church in the name of Christ that constitutes this authority. So we may say that earth hears from heaven when a church makes such a decision. Suggestion: When Cain was asked by God where his brother Abel was, he protested, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Ask how we should answer that question when it comes to the congregation of New Boston Baptist Church. Discuss some ways the authority of the local church should affect a believer's life: pastoral teaching and direction (Heb. 13:17), arbitration of disputes between Christians (see also 1 Cor. 6:1-8), mutual accountability to live for the Lord (our Covenant; Heb. 10:24-25).
2. Answer: He meant that the gathered people of the church are a temple (v. 17). We are God's temple because the Spirit of God dwells in our assembly (v. 16; the *ye* refers to "the church of God which is at Corinth" (1:2)). As the dwelling place of God on earth, we are the pillar and ground of the truth. It is our trust to publish abroad God's truth – like a pillar, and pass it along unchanged for the generations that follow us, like a ground or foundation stone. This is important for us because we must be very careful about the way we treat a local church. We must build the local church with the right materials, and our eternal reward will depend on how we have done that (vv. 12-15). Damaging the church is a sin that the Lord takes very seriously (v. 17). That damage can often come from the pride of worldly wisdom and glorifying men too much (vv. 18-23). Suggestion: Over 50 years of history, New Boston Baptist Church has known both its builders and its defilers. Some folks have done both. What are ways in which people build a local church? What are ways in which they defile it?
3. Answer: Characteristics of Christ-likeness that make for a good church member include (1) selfless sacrifice (v. 1); (2) nonconformity to this world (v. 2); (3) humility (v. 3); (4) exercise our giftedness for the benefit of the body (vv. 4-8); (5) love that is true enough to choose right over wrong (v. 9); (6) the ability to put others before self (v. 10); (7) diligent and enthusiastic service (v. 11); (8) positive, patient, prayerfulness (v. 12); (9) generosity (v. 13); (10) faithfulness in the face of persecution (v. 14); sympathy through familiarity (v. 15); unity through humility (v. 16); maintain a good testimony in the face of an evil world (vv. 17-21). Suggestion: Ask for testimonies of episodes when a church member showed this characteristic of Christlikeness such that it was a blessing in your life.

Section Two, Lesson Eight: We grow through God's discipline.

1. Answer: The role is Master (Matt. 6:24). The temptation that dishonors God in His role as our Master is the temptation to make something or someone else our Master. Jesus mentions money as especially troublesome. The commands to avoid the temptation of making money our master are (1) be faithful and trusting rather than worried about material needs (vv. 25-32, 34, see also Jam. 4:13-17); (2) prioritize the well-being of God's kingdom and conformity to His righteousness – His definition of right and wrong (v. 33). Suggestion: Note how this can be an especially difficult temptation for fathers themselves. We have hungry mouths to feed and bills we have to pay, but as we face these responsibilities, we must do so not only as the fathers of our families, but also as the children of our Heavenly Father. He requires that we put the kingdom of God and doing right first, and that we trust Him to supply what else we need. God's kingdom is currently not of this world, but it is in this world. It is the work of the church to advance the kingdom of Christ in this evil world as the possessor of its keys (Matt. 16:18-19), so putting that kingdom first includes prioritizing local church ministry and responsibility in this day and age.
2. Answer: The Lord disciplines us (1) for our profit, that we may be partakers of his holiness (Heb. 12:10); (2) production of the peaceable fruit of righteousness in our lives (v. 11); (3) and to strengthen our feeble weakness in the path the Lord has put us on (vv. 12-13). Suggestion: God knows that we need discipline to become Christ-like. He is not negligent in this manner, for He loves us perfectly (v. 6). If a professing believer can live in sin without suffering any consequence, his profession cannot be believed on the grounds of this truth. It also follows that under-disciplined human children are actually under-loved children. As human fathers we need to love our kids enough to be willing to suffer all the grief that discipline need requires us to suffer (v. 11).
3. Answer: We may avoid discipline and enjoy blessing from our Heavenly Father by (1) seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness (Matt. 6:33), (2) persevering in prayer (Luke 11:9), and (3) examining ourselves correctly in the light of God's Word (1 Cor. 11:31-32). Suggestion: When God is chastening us, He is doing so because His Spirit is grieved and quenched. Times of chastening are also times of forfeited blessing. Just as a disobedient child not only requires discipline but also forfeits the joyful commendation and blessing of a parent, so our disobedience causes us to forfeit the blessing that would otherwise be poured out upon us in abundance. We must learn to examine ourselves so as to invite God's blessing upon us. This is done by daily time in God's Word (James 1:22-25). Ordinarily, times of chastening come on the heels of times of the neglect of the Word of God. Perhaps it would be helpful to take some time to share some episodes of God's chastening in our lives, times we can look back on and say with candor and honesty – "those trials were to get me back on track again."

Section Two, Lesson Nine: We grow through suffering.

1. Answer: The important truth to which Job clung was that that God was intimately acquainted with what Job was experiencing (“He knoweth the way that I take”) because it was a part of His plan for Job to be purified and come forth as gold (v. 10). Even the steps he took were the steps ordered by the Lord (v. 11; Ps. 37:23-27). This truth came to Job’s heart by way of his commitment to God’s Word (v. 12). Suggestion: We need to see our Bibles as medicine for times of suffering. Bring your Bible when you go to the hospital. It is amazing how many people check into a hospital without their Bible. Hospitals try to get suffering people to eat what they need, but Job affirms that God’s Words were even more necessary than this. Bring a Bible when you go to the hospital or to a home to encourage someone who is suffering. Job says from experience that God’s Word was the key to his faith while suffering. In the midst of our suffering, whatever the circumstance, we need faith that comes from hearing, and hearing that comes from the Word of God (Rom. 10:17).
2. Answer: The truths Paul mentions include that we always suffer with hope, and that hope can give us patience (Rom. 8:24-25); part of this hope is the truth that all things, good and bad, work together for good to those who love God and are called according to His purpose (8:28); part of this purpose is that we should be perfectly glorified (8:29-30). Paul mentions that, our suffering notwithstanding, the fact that God gave His own Son to us assures us that He will also freely give us all things (8:32); and that no suffering can ever separate us from the love of Christ (8:33-39). The way these truths came to encourage the heart of Paul on many occasions was through Paul’s prayer life (8:26-27). Prayer is indispensable when it comes to enduring suffering (Phil. 4:6-7, 1 Pet. 5:7). Suggestion: Though a bit off topic, it may be profitable to highlight the implications of Romans 8 for the false view of theistic evolution. God’s creation was subject to vanity in need of redemption at the same time (“this present time,” v. 18) humans were (vv. 20-23), and it will be redeemed when our bodies are redeemed in the resurrection (vv. 19, 23). It is not true that there was suffering, disease, and death in God’s creation prior to that which caused the need for redemption, the fall of man (Rom. 5:12).
3. Answer: It was “for the joy that was set before Him” that Christ endured the cross (v. 2). There was a certain anticipated joy that made the cross more endurable for Him. There is certainly the joy of the resurrection and exaltation at the right hand of God here, but there is more because the Son of God had that joy without going to the cross. The joy obtainable only by way of the suffering of the cross is the joy Jesus spoke of in John 15:11 and John 16:20-24. Jesus was strengthened in His suffering by the joy of the opportunity it gave Him to bring His joy to others. That joy could only be obtained through the suffering of the cross. Suggestion: Suffering will always provide some opportunity to help others in a way we would not otherwise be able to. Looking to Jesus in suffering includes seeing the joy He had in what His suffering would do ultimately for others. We need to see that in His example, and make that joy the reason we are able better to endure our suffering. It may be a doctor or a nurse who needs the gospel. It may be a brother or sister who needs encouragement. It may be a pastor who has been complaining too much and needs to be reminded how blessed he really is. Whatever it may be, be strengthened by the joy that God can use our suffering to help someone else. We are not the only ones who grow in Christ by our suffering.

Section Two, Lesson Ten: We grow through the promise of reward.

1. The talents (pieces of money) of the parable are metaphors or word pictures. We are not told specifically by the Lord what they symbolize or represent. What we know for sure is (1) that these talents belong to the Lord – they are His goods given to servants as a stewardship (v. 14), (2) that they are distributed unevenly to the Lord's servants (v. 15), and (3) that they have to do with the differing abilities of the servants (v. 15). While the value of a talent in today's currency is somewhat precarious, what can be said with confidence is that these pieces of money were the most valuable unit of currency in their time. They are precious and valuable gifts from the Lord to be invested for Him. They are commonly thought of as our abilities (which we commonly call our talents), our treasure, and our time. The desired yield on the investment is more of the same. So where we have used our abilities, treasure, and time for the Lord, more abilities, treasure, and time accrue for Him. This sounds very much like using our abilities, treasure, and time to make disciples of Christ, who then learn to do the same. One servant went unrewarded because the ability, treasure, and time he was given was not used to create a return for the Lord who gave him it. Note that he was not only unrewarded, he was punished. In truth, every truly saved person brings for some fruit for the Lord (Matt. 13:23). Suggestion: We need to ask ourselves the question, what percentage of our abilities (talents), treasure, and time are invested in helping others use their abilities, treasure, and time for the Lord? In other words, how faithful have we been making disciples (Matt. 28:19-20)?
2. The building in this context is the local church at Corinth, the ye of vv. 9, 16, and 17. Note that it is a specific kind of building – a temple of God which is holy. What this says about the rewarded work Paul mentions in this passage is that it is work that is focused on building the lives of people in a local church. Here again, the work of discipleship comes to the forefront. Suggestion: We often say that the local church is not the building, it is the people. That is exactly right. The building we meet in is the meeting place, not the church. But while we grasp that the building is not the church, we sometimes miss that the church is a building and we are called to build. The lives of these people are our responsibility. We are called to make our assembly a holy temple that brings glory to Christ and is a fit place for His Spirit to dwell. Do we have that sense of responsibility for our local church? If not, can we really expect the reward of v. 14?
3. Crowns are achieved through disciplined gospel ministry (1 Cor. 9:23-27), through winning the lost and ministering to the saints (Phil 4:1, 1 Thess. 2:19), by loving Christ's appearing while fighting a good fight, finishing our course, and keeping the faith (2 Tim. 4:7-8), by enduring testing (Jam. 1:12, Rev. 2:10), and by being a faithful leader of God's people (1 Pet. 5:4). Undoubtedly, this is not an exhaustive list, but only a sampling of the crowns available to the faithful believer. In the end our crowns are cast at the feet of Christ who is glorified by them (Rev. 4:10-11). Suggestion: The crowns mentioned throughout the New Testament are the wreathes achieved in athletic contests, not the diadems worn by kings. That said, the Parable of the Talents in Matthew does speak of rewarded believers ruling over many things. The millennium shall last 1000 years, and those years will not be the same experience for every believer. Those who have been faithful will be rewarded with ruling in ways that those who have not been so will not be. The crowns rewarded are imperishable, and they do not fade away. Now is the time to be busy about earning them. What would it be like to have no crown to cast at the feet of Christ some day?

Section Three, Lesson One: The fruit of the Spirit is a blessing of growth.

1. Answer: When it comes to the two ways, there are not many similarities except that they lead somewhere. Everyone has one of these two destinies. The difference between the two ways is that one is wide, broad, popular, easy, and the way to destruction; the other is narrow, confining, unpopular, difficult, and the way to life. When it comes to the similarity of the two trees, both bear fruit that identifies what kind of tree they are. Every man's life does this. The difference is that one tree is good, and another is corrupt, so the fruit of one is good and that of the other corrupt. The corrupt tree is hewed down and cast into the fire. When it comes to the two houses, both experienced the rain, the floods, and the wind. The trials of life are experienced by believer and unbeliever alike. The difference here is that one house was built on the rock, and the other on the sand, one by a wise man, and the other by a fool, and so one withstood the storm, while the other did not. Discussion: We can learn much about the fruit of spiritual growth from these pictures. Here are a few things: (1) we can expect to be the exception, not the rule, if we are on the road to life – alive spiritually and growing in Christ (“few there be that find it,” v. 14); the fruitful life will be an extraordinary life, and perhaps sometimes a lonely one; (2) true spiritual fruit involves doing the will of our Heavenly Father—obedience that He can see (v. 21), not working miracles—a performance that others can see (vv. 22-23); (3) this obedience of true spiritual fruit includes not only hearing the sayings of Jesus, but also doing what we hear (vv. 24, 26). Are we convinced that our lives will be fruitful and blessed if we obey our Father in heaven and do what we hear from Christ, even though that way is narrow and confining in many ways?
2. Answer: The way-side seed is unfruitful because Satan takes the Word of God out of the heart of the one who hears as soon as he hears it (vv. 14-15). The stony-ground seed is unfruitful because it is in the heart of someone who has great initial enthusiasm but is not able to endure under the pressures of affliction and persecution for the Word's sake (vv. 16-17). The thorny-ground seed is unfruitful because it is in the heart of someone who cares for this world, who is deceived by riches, and who desires other things more than spiritual fruitfulness through the Word of God (vv. 18-19). Discussion: Clearly, fruitfulness comes from the good ground, which readily receives God's Word (v. 20). But notice that it comes to it in varying degrees – 30, 60, and 100 fold. What accounts for the shortfall, in some cases a 70% shortfall, in fruitfulness? Although the parable does not answer that question directly, it is clear that no believer can read about the first three seeds and conclude that any of those experiences has never been his own experience. Perhaps our Lord implies here that the 30-fold believer has come short of 100 fold for the same three reasons that an unbeliever has no fruit. Certainly, we must all admit that we battle these fruit-spoilers every day of our lives. How can we have victory over each?
3. Answer: Conquering the flesh and bearing fruit is done by walking in the Spirit. The negative found in v. 16 is very emphatic in the Greek language when it says, “If you walk in the Spirit, you shall not [absolutely not] fulfill the lust of the flesh.” Simply put, it is impossible to fulfill the desire of our flesh if we are walking in the Spirit. The desire (or lust) itself may still be there, because the flesh is an ever-present problem, but that fleshly desire will not be fulfilled by the believer who is walking in the Spirit. Walking in the Spirit is a step beyond just living in the Spirit (v. 25). It includes making progress spiritually, what we have been calling *growing in Christlikeness*. How to do that was the focus of the previous ten lessons: abide in Christ, use God's Word, pray, confess sin, get baptized, celebrate the Lord's Table, be a faithful local church member, accept and appreciate God's chastening, suffer patiently, and be motivated by a heavenly reward. All of these things are the specifics of walking, not just living, in the Spirit. Discussion: This discussion about the works of the flesh and the fruit of the Spirit is bookended by a specific concern Paul had in mind—how believers treat one another (vv. 13-15, 26). The works of the flesh will distance believers from one another; the fruit of the Spirit will unite them in Christ. Evidently, the lives of divided Galatians indicated that some had not conquered the flesh by walking in the Spirit. What do our one-another relationships reflect in this regard?

Section Three, Lesson Two: Witnessing and disciple-making are blessings of growth.

1. Answer: The difference between being a witness and doing witnessing is that the first describes what you are, and the second describes what you do. It is the Pentecostal power of the Holy Spirit in our lives that makes us effective witnesses for Christ. Our witness goes wrong when that power is not present in our lives due to sin. Suggestion: Jesus does not say to His disciples merely that they would witness; He tells them that they would *be* witnesses (Acts 1:8). The assignment includes what we are, not merely what we do. So for better or for worse, we are the witnesses of the Lord. Even when we fail to do witnessing, we are a certain kind of witness. It is possible, I suppose, to be either a good/true witness or a bad/false witness, but we are witnesses, we have been called to the stand, and our lives will communicate to others either truth or error about what it means to be a follower of Christ. The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was especially a work of revelation, so our witness is a part of God's self-revelation to the world through the power of God's Spirit. Without that power in control of what we are, we will not be the witnesses Christ wants us to be. So our focus when it comes to our witness must be first on making sure that the Holy Spirit is not grieved or quenched by sin in our lives (1 Cor. 15:33-34, Eph. 4:30, and 1 Thess. 5:12-24). Consider this passage about an age of revival from Horatius Bonar, *Words to Winners of Souls*: "It is said of the energetic, pious and successful John Berridge that 'communion with God was what he enforced in the latter stages of his ministry. It was, indeed, his own meat and drink, and the banquet from which he never appeared to rise.' This shows us the source of his great strength. If we were always sitting at this banquet, then it might be recorded of us 'ere long, as of him, 'He was in the first year visited by about a thousand persons under serious impressions'" (19-20).
2. Answer: He spent time with them together away from the world. That time included teaching (Acts 1:3) and worship (Matt. 28:17). Suggestion: Our faithfulness to the times when disciples meet with Christ will be important preparation for the task of witnessing and making disciples. Never underestimate the significance of assembly times in the presence of our Savior together for our outreach to the world around us.
3. Answer: Here are some characteristics of Paul's disciple-making efforts from 1 Thess. 3:5-13 – (1) a heart-felt care about the spiritual condition of a fellow-believer in light of the tempter's desire to destroy him (v. 5); (2) a recognition that encouraging another to follow Jesus Christ is the reason for living (vv. 7-8); (3) taking joy in (or enthusiasm for) praying diligently for this one (vv. 9-10); (4) taking joy in (or enthusiasm for) arranging to perfect the faith of another face to face (v. 10); (5) a recognition and communication of the truth that God must do the miracles of Christian growth in the heart of another, so He gets the glory (vv. 11-12); (6) focusing on the goal of edification in three respects – (a) that another would love God's people in the local church, (b) that another would love all men (note the phrase *even as we do toward you*, i.e., love all men so as to become yourself a disciple-maker of them like I have been for you), and (c) and that another would live a holy life (vv. 12-13). Suggestion: Can we name a person in our lives with whom we have a relationship that is characterized by these things? If not, we may be falling short to some degree of making a disciple of Christ and obeying the Great Commission of Christ. What that means is that we may still have some growing in grace and Christlikeness to do before we can take on this responsibility. Perhaps we need someone to disciple us toward this end. If we are uncomfortable with making a disciple, we can at least be willing to be made a disciple by someone else.

Section Three, Lesson Three: A godly marriage is a blessing of growth.

1. Answer: Paul's emphasis in those passages is on godly living in the power of God's Spirit. What makes us a good Christian will make us a good husband or a good wife. Without the power of God's Spirit in control of our lives, marriage will not go well. Suggestion: Take a moment to discuss the practical need of a marriage for the instruction of Paul in these passages: Eph. 5:18-21 – (1) avoiding alcoholism (v. 18), (2) a positive and thankful attitude (vv. 19-20), (3) submitting to one another by focusing not on self but on the needs of your spouse (v. 21); Col. 3:12-17 – (1) humility and forgiveness instead of quarrels (vv. 12-13), (2) selfless love (v. 14), (3) a positive and thankful attitude (v. 15), (4) time in the word together (singing if possible? v.16), (5) glorify the name of Christ in word and deed together (v. 17).
2. Answer: A husband must be like Christ's love for His church. He must love his wife in this way. That love desires her sanctification especially, and it accomplishes that goal through the gift of self. A wife must be like Christ's submission to God the Father. Just like the wife has a head or leader in a husband, so also Christ has a head or a leader in God the Father. He was enthusiastic and faithful in His willingness to follow and submit to His Father's will (compare John 8:29 with Prov. 31:10-11). Suggestion: It may be helpful to mention some ways in which Yahweh of the Old Testament is the perfect example for a husband and a wife. Yahweh loved Israel as a husband, even when she was unfaithful to Him (Jer. 31:31-34). And Yahweh helped Israel the way a wife is designed to be the helper of her husband (Gen. 2:18, Ps. 33:20-22).
3. Answer: The Scripture indicates that a godly marriage is possible when only one spouse is truly godly. That spouse can have a sanctifying influence on an unbelieving spouse. The passage in 1 Peter even says that this influence can lead to the salvation of the lost spouse. Suggestion: Discuss what this means for the idea that says, "I could have a godly marriage if only my spouse would do better." Ultimately, if I am a husband with a poor marriage, it is not blessed of the Lord because I have failed to love my wife. And if I am a wife with a poor marriage, it will not do to blame my husband for his lack of love if I have not been supportive of his leadership and helping his cause.

Section Three, Lesson Four: A godly home is a blessing of growth.

1. Answer: The life of a would-be godly parent must be characterized by a love for the Lord (v. 5), by a heartfelt love for God's Word (v. 6), by plenty of time spent with the child so that they can see in the everyday experiences of life those two loves (vv. 7-9), and by the example of righteous obedience to God's laws (v. 1, 24-25). These character traits in the life of a parent will raise an important question in the heart and mind of a child – "Why does this all mean so much to you?" (v. 20). The answer they must hear from us is that the Lord mightily saved us from our sins and has given us new life in Christ, just like He saved the nation of Israel from bondage in Egypt through miraculous wonders (vv. 21-23). For the Old Testament believer, new life free from bondage entailed being a good citizen of a new nation rescued from bondage and given a new land. He could not set the example for his child and refuse to be a good member of the theocracy of Israel. For the New Testament believer, new life entails being a good member of a local church called out from a hostile world to make disciples of Christ. He cannot be a good example to his child without being actively engaged in this ministry of the local church. Suggestion: Pause to speak of the importance of understanding our potential ministry as parents to our grandchildren (see v. 2). Our sons' sons, if God should so bless us, should be a big part of our retirement plans. How well we raise our children will certainly affect the lives of our grandchildren, but even more than this, we should have as one of the goals of our old age to minister to our grandchildren in the same Deuteronomy-6 way that we now endeavor to minister to our children (see Joseph's example in Gen. 50:22-23).
2. Answer: The responsibilities of a parent to a child include: (1) to live a righteous life of example that will inspire your child (11:21, 17:6), (2) to train your child through instruction and discipline, including corporal discipline for the young (13:24, 19:18, 22:6, 22:15, 29:15-17), and (3) to provide a motherly focus on home-building (14:1). The responsibilities of a child to a parent include: (1) to obediently value a parent's instruction and correction (1:8-9, 13:1, 19:26, 23:22, 23:26), (2) to be wise instead of foolish so your parent is joyful instead of sorrowful (10:1, 15:20, 17:21, 25, 23:15-16, 23:24-25, 27:11, 28:7), and (3) to honor your father and mother with great respect (20:20, 28:24, 30:11, 15-17). Suggestion: Take the time to write these things on the whiteboard, and emphasize how the parent-child relationship is a two-way street, with important responsibilities of ministry flowing both from parent to child and from child to parent.
3. Answer: The Lord must be sovereign over the parent-child relationship. Children must obey in the Lord and because of His commands. Parents, especially fathers, must not exasperate their children but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, not the customs and preferences they come up with on their own. Suggestion: A great way to close would be to emphasize how important our relationship with the Lord is to our parent-child relationships. We cannot be the children God wants us to be or the parents God wants us to be unless we are growing in Christlikeness through the power of His Holy Spirit. Remember that Jesus is a Son with a perfect relationship to His Father. The more we are like Him, the happier our homes will be.

Section Three, Lesson Five: Personal holiness is a blessing of Christian growth.

1. Answer: What damaged the hedge was poor leadership, specifically leadership that failed to put a difference between the holy and the profane and between the clean and the unclean. That difference is the hedge that protects the lives, homes, and churches of God's people. With that hedge in shambles, other problems invaded the lives of God's people and His work: (1) harming others for selfish reasons (vv. 25, 27, 29); (2) disrespecting Sabbaths (v. 26); and false teaching (v. 28). Suggestion: It is important to note that the damage described here was done especially by the leadership of Israel – prophets (v. 25, 28), priests (v. 26), and princes (v. 27). The people of the land became what they were first (v. 29). The New Testament also speaks of the importance of godly leaders who are willing to put a clear difference between the holy and the unholy, the clean and the unclean. One NT example is the way Paul avoided meat that was known to have been sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 10:23-11:1). The issue was not only whether eating that meat was ok in itself, but also whether my use of it would lead a weaker brother astray (1 Cor. 8:8-13). Godly leaders understand how to flee idolatry (10:12-14), and that understanding provides a hedge around the people of God whom they are called to disciple and lead.
2. Answer: What makes the world spiritually dangerous for the believer is its ability to feed and encourage our sinful nature – the desire of our eyes with its possessions, the desire of our flesh with its experiences, and the pride of our lives with its praise. We avoid the spiritual damage this can do to us by loving our Heavenly Father instead. That love includes presenting our bodies as a living sacrifice for Him, which sacrifice must be holy and acceptable, and refusing to be conformed to the world through mind transformation. As our minds are renewed, our outward form becomes distinct from the world like Daniel's was. Suggestion: Note that Daniel 1:21 anticipates the amazing influence for God that Daniel had in the worldly environment where God had placed him. Chapter One tells us that this influence was not powered by a willingness to be as much like the Babylonians and Persians as possible, but rather to be as distinct as necessary to keep a difference between what is clean and unclean. We need to be careful about two areas of distinctiveness or nonconformity especially as believers in our world today: (1) our thought life (Ps. 1:2; Phil. 4:8 – music choices, television choices, entertainment venues, recreational activities, recreational drink and food, and holiday celebrations – all these affect our thinking); (2) our communication (Eph. 4:29 – courtesy of speech, modesty and appropriateness of dress, length of hair, cleanliness and orderliness – all these are a part of our communication).
3. Answer: The claim that God is only concerned with our inside, our heart, when it comes to personal holiness is a trap of worldliness. To try to have a clean outside of the life without ever cleaning up the inside certainly is Pharisaical (Matt. 23:25, 28). But the Lord's remedy is not that the outside can be less than clean (v. 26). Instead, He says, "Cleanse first that which is within the cup and platter, *that the outside of them may be clean also.*" Suggestion: So when it comes to our thought life, what we contemplate in our heart on the inside will be seen in the way we live our lives on the outside, whether good or bad (Prov. 4:23). We keep our heart with all diligence, because God is concerned with the outward issuances of our life. And when it comes to our communication, a man speaks out of the abundance of his heart (Matt. 12:34). So God wants the heart corrected on the inside of us because He is very concerned about what our lives communicate to others on the outside of us.

Section Three, Lesson Six: Decision-making in the will of God is a blessing of Christian growth.

1. Answer: Do not be motivated by anxiety or envy of evil-doers (vv. 1-2); delight in the Lord and make the most of your present opportunities to serve Him where you are (vv. 3-4); commit the decision to the Lord with a genuine willingness to do whatever He wants (vv. 5-6); be patient, not angry (vv. 7-10); be humble, not proud (v. 11). Suggestion: The phrase, "He shall give you the desires of your heart," is a fascinating way to think about making decisions that are in the will of God. It would be good to emphasize the truth that when our lives in these other areas are what they should be, God is at work in our lives to control our desires. Those desires may seem inexplicable to many (like the way Grace Church of Mentor has no snowbirds, for instance), but they are known as a gift from heaven to people who are truly following the other commands of this Psalm. We might say that doing God's will requires truly delighting in the Lord and then simply doing whatever He causes us to want to do as we delight in Him. So often we try to find God's will about a matter apart from truly delighting in Him.
2. Answer: Wisdom is very practical. It is a life-changing power, not merely an answer to a question aroused by our curiosity. The tests we can use to measure whether we have God's wisdom are His wise commands found in the first 12 verses of the chapter. Do we remember and obey the word of God (vv. 1, 3); do we trust the Lord rather than our own understanding (vv. 5-6); do we humbly fear the Lord turning away from evil (v. 7); do we honor the Lord in our giving to Him (v. 9); do we accept His correction and discipline (vv. 11-12)? To the degree that we can answer these questions in the affirmative, we shall live lives on the right path of the will of God, for we shall be under the control of God's wisdom. Suggestion: If Solomon's counsel is valid, and it is, it means that we must not try to make major life-changing decisions without these Christ-like characteristics in our lives. This is what James means when he says that the person who asks for wisdom must ask in faith, nothing wavering (Jam. 1:6-8). Asking for wisdom in bad faith is asking for God to show us His will in a matter when we are being disobedient about an aspect of His will that is plain and obvious and that He has already shown us. God will not give this double-minded man the wisdom needed in time of decision. So when the New Testament speaks of our finding the will of God for our lives, it focuses primarily on our moral obligations before the Lord (Mark 3:35, Rom. 12:2, 2 Cor. 8:5, Eph. 6:6, Col. 4:12, 1 Thess. 4:3, 5:18, Heb. 10:36, 1 Pet. 2:15, 4:2, 1 John 2:17). Get that right, and the other decisions that affect our lives will be made according to God's will, fully under His sovereign and protective control with His blessing upon us (Acts 13:36, Rom. 1:10, 8:27, 15:32, 1 Pet. 3:17, 4:19).
3. Answer: The warning signs of arrogance include the failure to say, "If the Lord wills," and the failure to know, "My life is a vapor." Suggestion: Contrast the arrogant man described by James with the Lord Jesus's example once more. Jesus could say, "I do nothing on my own," and "I do always the things that please Him" (John 8:28-30). To be Christ-like is to live that way and to make decisions in the will of God.

Section Three, Lesson Seven: The glorification of God is a blessing of Christian growth.

1. Answer: Isaiah grows as a believer first in his understanding of the Lord's glory by seeing Him as He is in this vision (vv. 1-4). The seraphim emphasize especially God's holiness in Isaiah's hearing. We grow when we come to better understand God's self-revelation as the holy and glorious God. This is the God we would not ourselves imagine. Isaiah also grows in his understanding of his own contrasting sinfulness and need for forgiveness, an understanding that comes to him as a direct result of the first understanding of God's holiness (vv. 5-7). Finally, Isaiah grows in his understanding of the calling the Lord gave him to be His messenger (v. 8). Willing obedience to God's command and call is the final stage of Christian growth after a greater understanding of God's holiness and our own sinfulness. Suggestion: *Glory* is easier to illustrate than it is to define. The glory of something is its intrinsic worth or value. To glorify something is to ascribe considerable value to that thing. It may be helpful to pause to illustrate what glory is as we think of the ways that the glorification of God is a blessing of Christian growth. As creatures made in the image of God, we share with angelic beings an ability to apprehend the glory of many things. When a bear catches a great salmon from a river, none of its fellow bears perceive that anything glorious has happened. But when a human fisherman catches such a fish, those fishing with him can and do celebrate the glory of that catch. They estimate its weight and size to see if it is the largest fish they have ever caught. They imagine how tasty its flesh will be after it has roasted on their grill in butter and garlic. If their partner caught the fish with his bare hands like a bear, then the feat is all the more glorious. In fact, these men can even see the glory of a bear catching a fish, though the bear cannot. The ability to apprehend glory is why Facebook and Snapchat are so popular. God is the most glorious entity of all. To glorify Him is to recognize that glory and to help others recognize that glory. God takes His own glory very seriously (Isa. 42:8). To glorify anything else with glorification that belongs to Him is idolatry, and He will defend such violations of His glory with His work of judgment. For this reason, God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble (1 Pet. 5:5).
2. Answer: Verse 14 speaks specifically about the way in which Jesus Christ glorified the Father. John 17:5 speaks of this same phenomenon. Perhaps the best way to sum up Jesus's glorification of the Father is to say with John that this glory was a life "full of grace and truth" (John 1:4, 14, 17). Jesus's life of truth is the light of the world (v. 4). It shines in the world's darkness enlightening every man universally (vv. 5, 9). Prophets testify of it (vv. 6-8); men must believe it (v. 7); and it made the invisible glory of God the Father visible (v. 18). Jesus's life of grace is the gift of the new birth (vv. 12-13), the willingness to tabernacle humbly among sinful men as one of them (v. 14), and the sacrificial gift of His own fullness to empty man (v. 16). Suggestion: Emphasize how that, just like glorifying the Father in truth and grace was the purpose for Christ's life and ministry, so our lives share the same purpose as those growing in Christlikeness (John 17:13-26). Though in the world, we are not of it, but rather we must be sanctified (set apart from the world) in the truth of God's word (vv. 13-17). We are sent into the world as Christ was (v. 18), to call men to believe in the Savior's free grace (vv. 20-21). All this is a gift to us of the glory that the Father first gave to Christ (v. 22). An important part of that glory is the unity that the Father and the Son share, which must prevail among believers if they are to accomplish this task (vv. 22-23). Someday, we all shall see what Isaiah saw (v. 24). So the more our lives are controlled by truth and grace, the more we will be unified, and the more we are unified, the more we will glorify the Lord as Christ did.
3. Answer: The challenges of local church ministry that provide a special opportunity to glorify God are created by the fact that the local church is called to minister the gospel of Christ to unbelievers and weaker brothers without offence (1 Cor. 10:32-33). At issue in this passage especially was whether or not a church member should purchase meat in the market that had been sacrificed to idols (vv. 23-30). For anyone but a church member, that is not much of an issue. If my family lived on an island by itself somewhere, I would not have to worry much about the commands Paul issues in this context (vv. 24, 33). But because I am a church member, glorifying God requires my thinking of the needs of others first. Suggestion: Note the incompatibility and "seeking my own profit" and "seeking the profit of many" in v. 33, and then ask which one Christ chose. He chose not to please Himself (Rom. 15:2-4). As we grow, we become more like Him, we please ourselves less, we please others more, and we do all to the glory of God. This is the chief and highest end of Christian growth, and local church ministry is the believer's God-designed context for learning how to do this more and more.