

Personal Spiritual Growth Lesson 5A

Fellowship

I'd like to welcome you back to Personal Spiritual Growth. We will continue with the final two lessons in this course. We will focus on the final two spokes of the Navigator's wheel and how we demonstrate our love for God through our love for others in the church and in the world.

Let's do a quick review. The Navigator's wheel provides us with a number of helpful tools to assess our personal spiritual growth, our relationship with Jesus. At the center of the wheel, we talked about a life centered on Christ in Lesson 2.

Jesus is the True Vine and we are branches called to simply abide or remain in Christ. Galatians 2:20 was a key verse. I have been crucified with Christ and it's not me living any longer. It's Jesus living in me and I'm going to live that life by faith in him who loved me and gave himself up for me.

The rim of the wheel is the obedient spirit-filled life. This was Lesson 3. When we put our trust in Jesus, the Holy Spirit indwells each believer. We are called to obey and when the desire to obey God's Word wells up within us, the Holy Spirit provides the power, the enabling, all that's needed to fulfill the life to which God has called us. We are to walk in a manner worthy of the calling that we've received.

We also discussed the difference between the indwelling of the Holy Spirit at the point of salvation and the filling of the Holy Spirit, which happens moment by moment throughout our Christian life as we surrender our will to his will.

In Lesson 4 we discussed our vertical relationship with God. There are spiritual disciplines of grace that God gives us, particularly through the Word of God and prayer that helps us develop our ongoing relationship with God.

There are many ways we can take in the Word. We can hear the Word and read the Word. We can study the Word of God, memorize and meditate on the Word of God.

When we utilize all of these approaches with the Bible, we have a firm grasp on the Word of God. Remember the Word/Hand picture. We have a firm grasp of the Word of God and that will help us to walk in obedience, to grow in love, to understand more of God's character, to understand more of what the Bible says, who Jesus is, and what he's accomplished for us.

This provides understanding of what the Bible says and who we are in Christ. It gives us the roadmap for how to live in relationship by the grace of God with a holy God.

We also discussed prayer in Lesson 4B. Prayer has many dimensions but the greater purpose of prayer may be to grow in our relationship with God.

It's the evidence of our faith. It's the evidence that a relationship with God exists. Through prayer we worship God. We thank him, surrender to him, align our hearts and our will to his will. We grow from just focusing on our own needs and begin to intercede for others.

God has left us here to make Jesus known, to see people put their trust in him and to see believers grow as disciples. Prayer is a way to access the power of God to accomplish his will. Prayer is a grace by which we see God's kingdom coming and his will being done on earth as it is in heaven.

These final two lessons in this course will focus on fellowship and witnessing.

Fellowship is our love for believers within the church, within the body of Christ.

Witnessing or evangelism, is one way to demonstrate the love of God to those who don't know Jesus yet.

Let's begin Lesson five, 5A on page 39 in your handout.

Looking at the Navigator's wheel, the two horizontal spokes focus on our relationship with others. From the beginning of the Bible we are called to love God and love our neighbor. This theme is continued throughout the Old and New Testaments.

The picture for this lesson reminds us of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples. It's a picture with feet in a basin of water with someone washing the feet. This is a demonstration of true servanthood towards one another. We will explore a few key passages from the Bible in this lesson that focus on this sacrificial love of God such as Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 13, 1 John 4. We are told in 1 John 4 that if we say we love God, who we can't see, but we hate our brother who we can see, we must ask, do we really love God?

The demonstration of our faith and our love for God will be evidenced in how we live out our faith, how we demonstrate love in the world in which God has created all people in his image and likeness. This the theme of this lesson and the next one.

As we begin on page 39, let's consider the importance of love. The religious leaders tested Jesus asking, "what was the greatest commandment in the law". Jesus replied, to love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. He said, and the second commandment is like it, love your neighbor as yourself. This is found in Matthew 22:37 - 39. In Lesson 4, we focused on demonstrating our love for God through the disciplines of the Word and prayer.

In this lesson, we will focus on our love for others within the church. It's interesting to know that the Greek word for fellowship is the word "koinonia". It means more than just fellowship, it means partnership, it means communion, it implies a deep sense of community and commitment. Within the body of Christ, the church, there is meant to be a deep love for one another, a true sense of community, of common unity, of common unity in Christ.

In John 13, Jesus provides a wonderful example for the way that believers are to love one another. This is the beginning of the Upper Room Discourse. It is the final teaching time that Jesus has with his disciples, the apostles. It starts in chapter 13 and continues through chapter 17.

This is the night before Jesus goes to the cross, and it is leading into what we would call the Last Supper. Jesus institutes the ordinance of Communion that will transform the Passover into this fulfillment of the New Covenant that was prophesied by Jeremiah in the Old Testament.

Let's read verses 1 through 17, and then make some observations related to the passage. We will discuss what we can learn from the example that Jesus has given us and how we are to love the way that Jesus loved.

"Now, before the feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, he rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist, then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and then to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, Lord, do you wash my feet? Jesus answered him, what I am doing you do not understand now, but afterwards you will understand. Peter said to him, you shall never wash my feet. Jesus answered him, if I do not wash your feet, you have no share with me.

Simon Peter said to him, Lord, not my feet only, but also my hands and my head. And Jesus said to him, the one who has bathed does not need to wash except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.

For he knew who it was who was going to betray him. That was why he said, not all of you are clean. When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, do you understand what I have done to you? You call me teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am.

If I, as your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. **For I have given you an example that you should also do just as I have done.** Truly I say to you, you are a servant. Truly I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them."

Jesus is washing the feet of his disciples. Let's make a few observations. There are a few questions in the middle of page 39.

Who are the main characters here?

We have Jesus, and all 12 of the apostles. Judas Iscariot is still with the group.

This was on the night right before Jesus was going to go to the cross. Later that evening, he would be betrayed by Judas in the Garden of Gethsemane. He would be arrested, and the following morning, he would be tried and crucified.

It is amazing that Jesus is doing for his apostles what they should have done for him. Jesus did what was reserved for the lowest of servants.

The lowest of slaves would wash the dirty feet of those that who had come into the house. None of his disciples served in this way. Jesus, humbled himself. He bowed down before those who have been his students for the last three years, and gave them this example.

They were not prepared for this. Peter was a perfect example. He said, Jesus, you can't wash my feet. And if Jesus was going to wash his feet then he should wash his entire body. Jesus tells him that because they have faith in him, they are already clean. They don't need a bath. There's a dirt of this world. There is a need for continual cleansing as we abide in Christ. This is not about relationship but rather fellowship.

Jesus said, I have given you an example. I, as your teacher and Lord, I'm humbling myself to serve you. And I want you to take that example and now go and serve others.

If you want to be great in the kingdom, you must be the servant of all. And greatness comes through servanthood. This was counter-cultural in Jesus' day, and it still is today.

What's even more amazing is that Judas appears to still be with the group at this point, because the meal had not started. This means that Jesus even washed the feet of the person who would betray him. Jesus lived out what he taught about loving your enemies, praying for them and blessing them.

Our actions may be the most powerful evangelistic tool that we have. When our life and our love match the words we share, people take notice. When we live out a servant's heart, a sacrificial heart to a watching world, this kind of love speaks louder than our words. This is how the Bible instructs us to love.

If we say we have faith in God and we love him, we are then called to live out this love for God in the way we love others.

We are called to serve each other, to teach one another, to spur one another on to love and good deeds, to confess our sin to one another. We are called to give generously to those that our God puts in our lives.

There are more than 25 "one another's" throughout the scriptures.

The scriptures call us to honor one another, to respect one another, to show hospitality to one another. We're to live at peace with one another. We're to speak to one another in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs, and in a way that would be encouraging and edifying to them.

We're to encourage one another and comfort one another.

This is not a theoretical kind of love. This is a practical, active love.

It's not just a feeling. It's a choice. It's a choice of obedience. In fact, we are called to love this way even when we do not feel like loving this way. Why, because this is how God loves. This is how Jesus demonstrated love. This was the example that he provided.

In John chapter 13, after Judas departs to fulfill his plan of betraying Jesus, Jesus continues his teaching. In verses 34 and 35, he says, “a new command I give you, love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this, the world will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”

It is interesting that Jesus says, a new command I give you.

Loving others was not new. It went back to Leviticus 19. Jesus quoted this as the second greatest commandment when he said we are to love our neighbor as ourself. So love has always been a part of the command that God has given to us.

What did Jesus mean when he said, “I give you a new command”?

It was not new in the sense of some new kind of substance or a new definition of something.

It was new in its quality or the freshness of it. There certainly was a new standard based upon Jesus’ teaching. No longer was the standard just to love your neighbor as yourself. The new standard was now, “as I have loved you, so you must love one another”.

We are called to love the same way Jesus’ loved. As followers of Jesus, we have the power to love with this deep love of God through the indwelling Holy Spirit. In Romans 5 we are told that God has poured His love into our hearts. We now have the ability to love in this way.

As we continue to the top of page 40, we see that Jesus provided another example for us. It is true that Jesus’ entire life was meant to be an example. We can say his whole life is an example for us that shows us how to live out our faith. But specifically, there are two very clear times where the scriptures say, Jesus set an example for us in this certain way.

One was in John 13 that we just read and the other is found in 1 Peter chapter 2. Jesus provided an example for us to follow when faced with suffering for his name’s sake, for the gospel. Jesus lived a life of servanthood and a life of submission to the Father’s will.

1 Peter 2:18-25 ...

¹⁸ Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. ¹⁹ For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. ²⁰ But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. ²¹ To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

²² “He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth.”

²³ When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. ²⁴ “He himself bore our sins” in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; “by his wounds you have been healed.” ²⁵ For “you were like sheep going astray,” but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Notice verse 21, **“to this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.**

Jesus willingly denied himself. In Philippians chapter 2, we're told that Jesus humbled himself. He took on the nature of his servant and became obedient to death, even death on the cross for our sins.

There are two examples Jesus gave us, an example of servanthood, and an example of how we are to suffer for the sake of the gospel in the name of Christ. These two examples actually work together. They both involve submission and surrender. As Jesus' followers were called to a life of self-denial and servanthood as well.

In Mark 10:45, we have a summary of the life of Jesus. The Son of man came not to be served but to serve and give his life as a ransom for many. Jesus lived a life of service and suffering. He was the suffering servant prophesied by Isaiah. Glory as the King of kings and the Lord of lords would follow his suffering.

We are called to the same life.

In Luke 9:23, Jesus said, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves, take up their cross daily, and follow me. God never calls us to a task without providing the means to accomplish the task, without equipping us to accomplish what he's calling us to do.

At the moment of salvation, every believer receives supernatural spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit. Every believer has at least one spiritual gift, but in reality probably various gifts.

I believe each believer has a unique mixture of different gifting from the Holy Spirit for the purpose of glorifying God and building up the body of Christ. You can see a reference to some of these spiritual gifts on page 40 in Romans 12:3-8.

There are four places in the New Testament where spiritual gifts are mentioned. All you need to do is remember the numbers 12 and 4. Various spiritual gifts are listed in Romans 12:3 - 8, 1 Corinthians 12:7 - 11, Ephesians 4:11 - 12, and 1 Peter 4:10 -11.

Romans 12:3 - 8, says ...

“For by the grace given me, I say to every one of you, do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourselves with sober judgment in accordance with the faith God has distributed to each of you. For just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. We have different gifts according to the grace given to each of us. If your gift is prophesying, then prophesy in accordance with your faith. If it is serving, then serve. If it is teaching, then teach. If it is to encourage, then give encouragement. If it is in giving, then give generously. If it is in to lead, then do it diligently. If it's to show mercy, do it cheerfully.”

You can circle the spiritual gifts in this passage, prophesying, serving, teaching, encouragement, giving, leadership, and mercy.

On pages 42-43 you can see a complete listing of the gifts from these four passages.

The Bible is clear that these gifts are distributed by the Holy Spirit for the purpose of strengthening the church and glorifying God. These gifts are to be used in love.

In 1 Corinthians 12, the apostle Paul was teaching on spiritual gifts with the church in Corinth that was abusing these gifts. There was a focus on pride and being the center of attention.

Paul was exhorting, encouraging and rebuking the church in Corinth for their pride and the abuse of those gifts. And in 1 Corinthians 13, Paul then says the context for using any of these gifts must be in love. He provides this beautiful definition of love. Love is patient, love is kind, love does not envy, it does not boast, doesn't keep records of wrong, it's not prideful, it's not rude, it's not easily angered.

This is list of 15 different definitions of what love looks like. This is the kind of love to be lived out within the church. These verses from 1 Corinthians 13 are often read during wedding ceremonies. This offers a picture of how husbands and wives should love each other. The primary context of this passage though is not marriage but rather the way that every believer should love other believers within the church. We are to live out this kind of agape love, the deep love of God towards other believers.

As we love in this way, the world will see that we are followers of Jesus.

On the bottom of page 40, there's a second "love" chapter. Many think that 1 Corinthians 13 is the love chapter in the Bible. Well, Romans 12 verse 9 to 21, is filled with practical commands to love one another. I will leave this passage for you to read and study on your own. Make note of the aspects of love where you may be strong and where God is calling you to grow. What might the church look like if we all loved this way. What impact might there be in the world around us if we loved in this way?

As we turn over to page 41, why do you think it is so important necessary to serve and love others within the church?

This kind of love requires discipline and intentionality. This is not natural but rather supernatural love. It is natural, in our old nature, to be selfish, self-centered, prideful.

As we are conformed to the likeness of Christ (think back to Lesson 1), we will grow in love. Loving this way is a choice. It is an act of obedience. As we obey in this way, we are demonstrating that we are the children of God.

There is another GTN course that we offer called Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts. I will share just a brief introduction that might spark your interest.

The Bible says that we are fearfully and wonderfully made, that we each are a combination of many different factors. And when we begin to identify by His grace, how God has SHAPED

us for ministry, we understand where we are called to be serving God. In this course that we offer, there's the word shape, S-H-A-P-E, that's in English.

Each of those letters stands for a different word. Each word reminds us that way that God has shaped us and prepared us to serve Him in this world. Here is a definition of each of these words.

The letter “S” stands for spiritual gifts. We ask the question, what am I gifted to do? Supernaturally, God has given each of us with at least one spiritual gift.

Sometimes we put all our energy in trying to figure out how has God gifted us spiritually. I think the best way to begin to see how God has gifted us spiritually is just to begin to serve. And with feedback from others as we are serving, we can sense, this is how God may have gifted me to serve within the church. You may be serving and someone says that they notice that people are encouraged after spending time with you. They suggest that you may have the spiritual gift of encouragement and that you should look for opportunities to serve with that focus. This can be applied with any of the spiritual gifts. As you begin to serve, God will often affirm your gifting through the feedback of others.

In addition to spiritual gifts, there are other ways that God has shaped us for ministry.

The second letter in the word SHAPE, is the letter “H”. “H” stands for heart or passions.

By His grace, God gives us different passions. We have passions for different types of groups, maybe for children or a different people groups in the world. These passions come from God. Our passion areas should provide insight into where we may be called to serve

The next letter in the word SHAPE is the letter “A”. “A” stands for natural abilities.

There are natural abilities from birth that God has given to each of us. These are skills, abilities, and interests that come naturally to us. We should look for way to use these abilities to glorify God.

The fourth letter in the word SHAPE is the letter “P”. “P” stands for our personality.

We each have a unique personality. Some of us are introverted, others are extroverted. Some of us are task oriented, while others love to focus on people. We should not say, I wish I was more like someone else. God has gifted me a certain type of personality. We should first identify how God has made us and then look to bring our unique personality traits into the way we serve God.

The final letter in the word SHAPE is the letter “E”. “E” stands for life experiences.

There are life experiences, trials, joys, difficult things, learning experiences that God is using to shape us. These experiences that we go through in life, prepare us to engage in ministry in the future.

When we put this all together, we begin to see how God has SHAPED us for ministry. We consider spiritual gifts, passions, natural abilities, personality and life experiences. As we begin to understand each of these areas, we can begin to serve in the unique ways that God has gifted us and shaped us to help build up the body of Christ. Understanding this is part of our spiritual training, part of our transformation process. This is one of the ways that the

Holy Spirit is conforming us to the likeness of Christ. We begin to love and serve like Jesus within the church. This in turn spurs others on to be growing, loving and serving as well.

- A next step for you to take may be to look for ways to be serving within the church.
- Look for ways to demonstrate the kind of love described in 1 Corinthians 13 and Romans 12.
- Review the list of spiritual gifts on pages 42-43 and determine how God may have gifted you to serve and build up the church.
- Ask for feedback from your spouse, family members, others within the church as to what they see in your life.
- Our GTN course on Discovering Your Spiritual Gifts may be helpful as well.

Let's reflect on the memory verse at the bottom of page 41.

“Now that I, your Lord and teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you.”

How can you follow the example of servanthood and suffering that Jesus modeled for us?

As we end this lesson and prepare for the final lesson on Witnessing, it will become clear that how we love and serve others is closely related to the ministry of evangelism.

The most powerful tool for witnessing is to not just speak the gospel, but to be living a life of love, a life of service, a life of servanthood that is aligned with the words we are sharing. We each have been called to a ministry of reconciliation. We are called to be witnesses for Christ. Most of us will never share the gospel in front of groups hundreds and thousands of people.

Most of us will have open doors to share with one person at a time. These people will be in our families, workplace, and communities. The effectiveness of our witness for Jesus will flow out of the authenticity of our love for others. People do not care how much you know about something until they know how much you care, for them. As we love the way Jesus loved within the church, Jesus said that the world would know that we are His followers. Our lives will be the loudest megaphone for the gospel. And when others who do not know Jesus yet see the love of Jesus lived out in us, that is very attractive. It is like a light shining in a dark room. All of the attention is drawn to the light. When people see the light and love of Jesus in us, we must then be prepared to share the truth of the gospel clearly, fearlessly, in love, with gentleness and respect.

Are you prepared to be a witness for Jesus? That will be the focus on the next lesson as we share the love of Jesus with those who do not know him yet.