

UNIT THREE: DIVINE NATURE

KEY SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR UNIT THREE

If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect. - Matthew 5:46-48

CLASS 1: RENDER YOUR HEART

1 Reading, 1 Scripture Worksheet, 1 Evaluation

God is looking for believers who offer themselves to Him completely. We must be willing to let God transform us from our old way of doing things to a new creation in Christ.

CLASS 2: I DESIRE MERCY

1 Reading, 2 Exercises, 1 Evaluation

As God's representatives on earth, He wants His heart of mercy to shine through to the lost and hurting world. Our ability to show mercy can be an indication of our understanding of how God has shown mercy to us.

CLASS 3: SUITABLE FOR SERVICE

1 Reading, 1 Evaluation, 1 Exercise

Much work "for God" is done without God's guidance, power, or character. Being suitable for service includes doing the right things for God at the right time, in the right way, and for the right reasons.

CLASS 4: MOTIVATIONAL GIFTS

1 Reading, 1 Evaluation, 2 Exercises

God works His nature inside of us through spiritual gifts. We flow in these gifts for the benefit of others as a reflection of the heart of God.

KEY QUESTIONS

GROUP EXERCISES

RENDER YOUR HEART

When Paul chastised the Corinthian church for being immature, he referred to their behavior as “carnal.” The word in Greek is *sarkikos*, rooted in the word *sarx*, which means animal nature. They had put their faith in Jesus but were still behaving like beasts by giving way to the lusts of their flesh rather than the desires of the Spirit. In the same letter, Paul referenced a “natural” man. This word is *psychikos*, rooted in the word *psych* from which we get the word psychology. This is the same word used by James for sensual wisdom. The natural man is ruled by his natural senses and considers spiritual things to be foolish because he is consumed with mental or moral ascent of his own rationale. But Paul also speaks of a “spiritual” person, or *pneumatikos*, rooted in the word *pneuma*, meaning spirit. This person is governed by the Spirit of the Lord and not by their own carnality, sensual lusts, or unsanctified thoughts. (See 1 Corinthians 2-3.)

Paul knew a little something about being transformed from a natural person to a spiritual person. Paul did not receive the Gospel message the first time he heard about Jesus. Quite the contrary, it infuriated him. He was a natural person, completely consumed with his own perspective on things and self-righteous attainment of much so-called knowledge of God. Paul knew the Scriptures and prophecies about the Messiah of Israel as well as or better than anyone in the world. But because Paul lacked the Holy Spirit, all of his interpretations of the Scriptures did not lead him to recognize God when God was standing right in front of him in the flesh of Jesus! But then one day, on his way to Damascus with a mission to imprison more Christians, Paul had an encounter with Jesus. His life was changed forever.

*Acts 26:14-15: We all fell to the ground, and I heard a voice saying to me in Aramaic, 'Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me? **It is hard for you to kick against the goads.**' Then I asked, 'Who are you, Lord?' 'I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting,' the Lord replied.*

A goad is an iron tool used to prod cattle along in the way that their masters want them to go and *kicking against the goads* was a proverbial expression for *resisting the obvious to the point of self-destruction*. All of Scripture pointed to Jesus like a master's goad directing Paul's path. But Paul had no ability to be anything but goaded until Jesus revealed Himself. Then, in a moment's time, everything Paul thought he believed about Jesus was changed. After this dramatic encounter, Paul went through a transformation. He laid aside his own way of thinking to become a man entirely ruled by the Spirit of the Lord.

Cut to the Heart

On the day of Pentecost, Peter quoted the Book of Joel. Joel had cried out to the people of Israel, summoning them to humble themselves before the Lord with fasting and prayer, to weep over their sin with genuine contrition, and to return to the Lord with their whole heart. God appealed to His people to drop the outward show and come back to Him in sincere faith and heartfelt devotion. The day of the Lord's judgment upon all nations is at hand and only those who render their hearts to God will be spared.

*Joel 2:1-3, 12-13: 1 "Blow the trumpet in Zion; sound the alarm on my holy hill. Let all who live in the land **tremble, for the day of the LORD is coming.** It is close at hand-- a day of darkness and gloom, a day of clouds and blackness. Like dawn spreading across the mountains a large and mighty army comes, such as never was in ancient times nor ever will be in ages to come. Before them fire devours, behind them a flame blazes. Before them the land is like the garden of Eden, behind them, a desert waste-- **nothing escapes them**"... "Even now," declares the*

LORD, "return to me with all your heart, with fasting and weeping and mourning. Rend your heart and not your garments. Return to the LORD your God, for he is gracious and compassionate, slow to anger and abounding in love, and he relents from sending calamity."

On the day of Pentecost, people had again become religious in their outward demonstration of devotion without really meaning it in their hearts. They were functioning as natural people, devoid of the Spirit of the Lord, ruled by their own natural thoughts and desires. But now, Peter declared the word and it went out like a double-edged sword, piercing through the soul and exposing the motives of the heart while the Holy Spirit brought conviction of sin, righteousness, and judgment. Many people in Jerusalem were cut to the heart and begged to know what they needed to do to get right with God.

*Acts 2:36-40: "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." When the people heard this, **they were cut to the heart** and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, **what shall we do?**" Peter replied, "**Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.** The promise is for you and your children and for all who are far off--for all whom the Lord our God will call." **With many other words he warned them; and he pleaded with them, "Save yourselves from this corrupt generation."***

I have heard that receiving the message of the Gospel could be compared to receiving a beautifully wrapped gift, only to open it and discover inside a bottle of mouthwash. What Jesus has done for us is the most wonderful and poignant expression of love the world has ever known. But in order to receive this love, we must first admit that we need His salvation. The call to following Jesus and remaining in Him requires us to stop denying our issues, blame-shifting to deflect God's dealings with us, and hiding behind excuses for ungodliness as self-made pardons for behavior unworthy of God.

Understandably, when Stephen made a speech similar to Peter's to another crowd on a different day, they were also cut to the heart but gnashed their teeth at Stephen and then stoned him to death. (See Acts 7:51-54.) They were not yet ready to deal with the planks in their own eyes.

Peter's Pentecost message remains the cry of God's heart to all people today. God's desire has always been for a people who will worship Him from the heart in pure and simple devotion and submission to His ways. (See Deuteronomy 10:16.) But all of mankind has turned away from God and all people are living lives of sin and error, folly and complacency, and religion and hypocrisy. Everyone is pretending to be good outwardly while plotting selfish schemes inwardly, and judging one another relentlessly while indulging their own selfish lusts to the max. The day of judgment is coming upon the world for this. Everyone who has not rendered their heart to Jesus is lost, without hope, and is destined for eternal destruction in a place where the fire never goes out and where there is torment, weeping, and gnashing of teeth.

After the days of Joel, when the time came for judgment on the city of Jerusalem, Ezekiel had a vision of a man dressed in white linen. (See Ezekiel 9.) This man in linen was commissioned by God to identify those who had genuinely rendered their hearts to God. They would be the ones who wept, sighed, and grieved over the sin and horrendous lack of regard for God in the city. On these people, the man in linen was ordered to place the mark of God, which would seal them and spare them from destruction.

Have you been cut to the heart?

The Need for Re-birth

All of us need to be transformed from being natural people to becoming spiritual people. God knows if we have been outwardly religious for selfish reasons (i.e. to look good, be regarded as holy, to get something from God, etc.) God knows if our lips are praising Him while we hold murder in our hearts. God knows that our hearts are inherently wicked and that without the Holy Spirit, we are helpless and hopelessly

enslaved to our own sinful nature. This is why we must be born again by the Spirit of the Lord who writes the word of God upon our hearts and transforms us from the inside out.

When John was writing his gospel account of the life and ministry of Jesus, he relayed this emphatically. For example, in John 2, Jesus went to the Temple in Jerusalem where He turned over tables and made whips to drive out the merchants and their livestock merchandise. The nature of man is totally selfish, even at the expense of God and the sanctity of God's house. Immediately following this, Nicodemus came to Jesus, believing that He must be sent by God. Jesus explained to Nicodemus that no one can enter the Kingdom of God unless they are born again by the Spirit. However, Nicodemus was focused on earthly things, whereas Jesus was focused only on heavenly, eternal things. Jesus allegorically explained to Nicodemus that for this, the world was about to kill Him as an enemy. Only those who were reborn by the Spirit of the Lord would perceive the ways of God in the midst of the world's hostility.

Similarly, in the Book of Luke, chapter 18 contains stories in succession which reveal a deeper intent. Jesus told the story of the Pharisee, with his self-proclaimed piety and righteousness, who looked down on the Tax Collector who humbled himself before God in genuine contrition. This is followed by an exhortation to childlikeness. Then, in living demonstration of this parable, the Rich Young Ruler approached Jesus thinking that he had attained some level of righteousness through his own outward observances and application of the laws and statutes of God. But Jesus knew this man's heart and challenged him to shift his focus to heavenly things by giving all of his earthly things away. This man went away sad. God sees no value in outward religion if the heart is still set on its own desires and self-exaltation. Only those who will humble themselves like children in the hands of God will receive the fullness of what He has done for us.

The most poignant example of this is in Matthew 16 when Peter professed that Jesus is the Messiah and the Son of God. Jesus praised Peter for this revelation in thanksgiving that God had revealed this to Peter directly. Now that His disciples had the clear picture of who Jesus really is, Jesus began to speak to them about how He must suffer and die and be crucified. The same Peter who acclaimed Jesus as the Son of God now took the Son of God to the side to rebuke Him for His erroneous thinking. But it was Peter who had the wrong idea. Jesus rebuked Peter sharply, saying, "Get behind me, Satan! You have on your mind the ways of man and not of God." Even though Peter believed who Jesus was, he had not yet been cut to the heart. As such, his profession of faith went no further than his mind and his lips. His heart was still ruled by selfishness, the ways of this world, and the evil one.

All of us are in jeopardy of Peter's mistake if we will not allow ourselves to be cut to the heart and transformed by the Holy Spirit. Jesus made it clear that not everyone who calls Him Lord will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. Those who say they believe and even who work mighty things in Jesus' name but have not been deeply changed and transformed into spiritual people will be rebuked as ones who have instead worked for Satan and his agenda.

*Matthew 7:21-23: **Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name and in your name drive out demons and in your name perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'***

The unregenerate Peter proclaimed his own steadfast love but lacked the self-awareness to know the evil that was still within him. He went on to deny Jesus three times. Then, Peter was cut to the heart. He wept bitterly and was grieved to the depths of his soul. The depths of the depravity of his own humanity has been revealed to him and he would never be the same. When Jesus went to restore Peter to Kingdom service by the sea of Galilee, Peter had a new understanding of himself and could not honestly profess that truly selfless agape love was within him. Nevertheless, it was this very same Peter who went on to be filled with the Holy Spirit and proclaimed the message of repentance and the need for being cut to the

heart. Peter had a new understanding of the wickedness of the human heart and the need for salvation from the corruption of his generation. It was this regenerated Peter who went on to be crucified upside down because he did not consider himself worthy to be martyred in the same way that Jesus had died.

Have you been reborn?

Offer Yourself

In Peter's last message from prison before he died for Christ (which is the letter we know of as 2 Peter) he exhorted believers as strongly as possible not to be shortsighted in their faith the way that he had been so that they would not stumble. When we put our faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit comes to dwell inside of us. The divine nature of God dwells within us to guide us. In order to be a spiritual person, Peter said we have to participate and be a partaker of God's nature within us. Essentially, this means to partner with God for His purposes rather than resist Him for our purposes.

*2 Peter 1:3-4: His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them **you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.***

True transformation of the heart can only be done by God Himself. This said, God will never subvert our free will. He does not turn us into robots or domineer over us to force us to do what He wants. That is not love. God asks us to willingly participate with Him and to turn ourselves over to Him in childlike confidence and willing surrender. Obedience is a choice. We are slaves to whomever and whatever we choose to obey. Outside pressures may influence our choices, but no one else controls our hearts or motives.

When Peter denied Jesus, he neglected his eternal best interest for the sake of his temporal protection. His motive was understandable. But his denial of Christ exposed his heart. We may never be put in the same position as Peter was. But we each face decisions every day which give us the opportunity to submit to God or to the pressures of this world and other people. If we profess with our mouth that Jesus is Lord but choose with our choices to follow another, we have not yet rendered our hearts completely.

When Paul persecuted Christians by imprisoning and killing them, he thought he was being exceedingly zealous for the right cause and for the sake of the name of God. But the blindness of his heart was exposed when he saw the Lord. We may never be as zealous as Paul was and our persecution of true believers may not be as obvious. But we each face decisions every day where we take a stand in our heart for what we believe to be right and what we believe to be wrong. If we serve God with all our might but fail to know the heart of God, we will constantly be kicking against the goads because our hearts have not yet been pricked.

Through the death and resurrection of Jesus, we have been set free from slavery to sin and have become a new creation. But we must also choose to live as this new creation by not indulging the old natural nature that still resides in the members of our flesh and tempts us to behave like beasts. We must daily deny the demands of our own fleshly lusts and passions in order to submit ourselves totally to the purity of the likeness of Christ. We must choose to serve God rather than ourselves and our own agendas – even the agendas we think are for God's Kingdom. We must daily lay our lives down as a sacrifice to Jesus, relinquishing all our ideas of what God is doing, why He is doing it, how He is doing it, through whom He will choose to do it, and in what timing He will do it. We must allow ourselves to be entirely governed by the Holy Spirit so that we can become truly spiritual people.

Have you rendered your heart?

PUT OFF OLD & PUT ON CHRIST

Scripture List & Worksheet

Directions:

1. Read through and meditate on the following Scriptures. Notice how we are called to renounce our old ways and put on Christ to live by His divine nature to lead us in godliness.
2. Allow the Holy Spirit to highlight to you how the Lord is calling you into deeper repentance and obedience in some of these areas.
3. Ask God to help you put into practice what the Holy Spirit reveals to you.

Ephesians 4:17-32: So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the **futility of their thinking**. They are **darkened in their understanding** and separated from the life of God because of the **ignorance** that is in them due to the **hardening of their hearts**. Having **lost all sensitivty**, they have given themselves over to **sensuality** so as to indulge in **every kind of impurity**, and they are **full of greed**. That, however, is not the way of life you learned when you heard about Christ and were taught in him in accordance with the truth that is in Jesus. You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to **put off your old self**, which is being **corrupted by its deceitful desires**; to **be made new in the attitude of your minds**; and to **put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness**. Therefore each of you must **put off falsehood and speak truthfully** to your neighbor, for we are all members of one body. "In your anger do not sin": **Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry**, and **do not give the devil a foothold**. Anyone who has been stealing must **steal no longer**, but must work, doing something useful with their own hands, that they may have something to **share with those in need**. **Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths**, but only what is **helpful for building others up** according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. And **do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God**, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. **Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice**. **Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you**.

Romans 6:11-14: In the same way, **count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus**. Therefore **do not let sin reign in your mortal body so that you obey its evil desires**. **Do not offer any part of yourself to sin as an instrument of wickedness**, but rather **offer yourselves to God** as those who have been brought from death to life; and **offer every part of yourself to him as an instrument of righteousness**. For sin shall no longer be your master, because you are not under the law, but under grace.

Romans 13:12-14: The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So **let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light**. Let us **behave decently**, as in the daytime, **not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy**. Rather, **clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh**.

Colossians 3:1-14: Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, **set your hearts on things above**, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. **Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things**. For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. **Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry**. Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. But now you must also **rid yourselves**

of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, **clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.** Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues **put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.**

Ephesians 5:1-20: Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and **walk in the way of love,** just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. But among you there must **not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed,** because these are improper for God's holy people. Nor should there be **obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking,** which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. For of this you can be sure: **No immoral, impure or greedy person--such a person is an idolater--has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.** Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. Therefore do not be partners with them. For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. **Live as children of light (for the fruit of the light consists in all goodness, righteousness and truth) and find out what pleases the Lord.** Have **nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness,** but rather expose them. It is shameful even to mention what the disobedient do in secret. But everything exposed by the light becomes visible--and everything that is illuminated becomes a light. This is why it is said: "Wake up, sleeper, rise from the dead, and Christ will shine on you." Be very careful, then, how you live--**not as unwise but as wise,** making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore **do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit,** speaking to one another with psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit. **Sing and make music from your heart to the Lord,** always giving thanks to God the Father for everything, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Hebrews 3:12-13: See to it, brothers and sisters, that **none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God.** But **encourage one another daily,** as long as it is called "Today," so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Hebrews 12:1-4: Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us **throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles.** And let us **run with perseverance the race marked out for us,** fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith. For the joy set before him he endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinners, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood.

James 1:19-22: My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. Therefore, **get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.** Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. **Do what it says.**

2 Peter 1:5-8: For this very reason, **make every effort to add to your faith goodness;** and to goodness, **knowledge;** and to knowledge, **self-control;** and to self-control, **perseverance;** and to perseverance,

godliness; and to godliness, **mutual affection;** and to mutual affection, **love.** For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Practical Application:

3 Things I Need to "Put Off"	3 Things I Need to "Put On"
1.	1.
2.	2.
3.	3.
How God is Showing Me to Do This:	How God is Showing Me to Do This:

MOTIVE INSPECTION

1 = Needs improvement

2 = In Refining Process

3 = Doing Well for Now

Motive Inspection – *for all decisions large and small – no provision for the flesh*

Have I prayed about this?	1	2	3
Am I doing this because God spoke to me or guided me to do it?	1	2	3
Am I doing this out of religious obligation or to earn God's approval, favor, or love?	1	2	3
Am I doing this because it is "the right thing to do?" (Rather than from genuine love.)	1	2	3
Am I doing this because it is what other people do or want me to do?	1	2	3
Am I doing this to imitate or appease other people? Am I doing this to be accepted?	1	2	3
Am I doing this to serve God or my own desires?	1	2	3
Am I doing this to glorify God?	1	2	3
Am I doing this to be promoted, look heroic, or advance my own agenda or reputation?	1	2	3
Am I doing this to reach more people for Jesus?	1	2	3
Am I doing this to serve God or conform to this world's pattern? Am I double-minded?	1	2	3
Am I obeying God's instructions completely or am I compromising?	1	2	3
Am I doing this out of faith or fear?	1	2	3

All a person's ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the LORD.

Proverbs 16:2

I DESIRE MERCY

In the days of Hosea, God commanded Hosea to marry a prostitute. Hosea provided a good home for her and they had children. But as a married woman, she returned to her prostitution and even sold herself over to a pimp. In complete disregard for the provision of her husband, she announced that her prostitution had produced for her all the wonderful things she had attained. Imagine Hosea's humiliation and the scorn he must have endured from others looking down on this. The penalty for adultery was death and Hosea could have rightfully cast the first stone to kill his wife. But instead, God told Hosea to buy his wife back out of prostitution, and he did. At that time, Hosea ordered her that she would not be prostituting herself anymore and that even he would not be having marital relations with her for some time. She could no longer use sex to attain what she desired. Even if it meant Hosea giving up his marital right as a husband, it was more important that she learn and experience what real love and mercy is.

One of the token marks of spiritual maturity is mercy. This is evidenced by our ability to treat our enemies the same way we treat our friends, no matter what they have done to us.

*Matthew 5:43-48: You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, **love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven.** He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? **Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.***

*Luke 6:27-36: But to you who are listening I say: **Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.** If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. **Do to others as you would have them do to you.** If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But **love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back.** Then your reward will be great, and **you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.***

After Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, God could have killed them. What they did was wrong. God could have punished them by cutting off their entire food supply on earth. He could have allowed them to plant food only to vindictively wash it away with droves of rain. He could have done many things to make life exceedingly miserable for them. But in His great mercy, He did not do any of these things. Although there were pre-disclosed consequences for Adam's disobedience, including separation from God, God did not starve or kill Adam for his rebellion. It was not until ten generations later, when all of Adam's descendants had repeatedly persisted in evil works and wickedness, that God finally put rebellion to an end with the flood. Only after about one thousand years did God's mercy run out.

God is slow to anger and full of mercy.

In spite of the fact that all of mankind is constantly in utter rebellion against Him, He still causes the sun to come up and the light to shine each day so that we can live. He has the ability to withhold rain or cause terrifying hail to fall on those who disregard Him. The day will come for that. But God overlooks these offenses and turns His divine cheek to more abuse by ungrateful people without withholding what they need for their sustenance even though He could.

Mercy is God's nature. As the incarnation of God and all that God's nature entails, Jesus was moved with compassion for people who were hurting and wandering like sheep without a shepherd. They had all been subjected to sin and sickness and death but instead of leaving them in their condition as God's righteous judgment upon them, Jesus' heart went out to them with mercy.

*Matthew 14:14: When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, **He had compassion on them and healed their sick.***

*Matthew 20:34: **Jesus had compassion on them** and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed Him.*

*Mark 6:34: When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, **He had compassion on them,** because they were like sheep without a shepherd. So He began teaching them many things.*

*Mark 8:2: "**I have compassion for these people;** they have already been with Me three days and have nothing to eat." (Then Jesus miraculously fed the 4,000.)*

*Luke 7:12-13: As He approached the town gate, a dead person was being carried out-- the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a large crowd from the town was with her. **When the Lord saw her, His heart went out to her** and He said, "Don't cry."*

Mercy does not say that wrong is right. God is absolutely righteous and just. When Jesus died on the cross for our sins, He was not saying that sin is not sin. Jesus took the righteous punishment for sin so that we could receive mercy from God. Now, He calls upon us to be like Him and take up our cross and turn the other cheek to offenses so that others can receive His mercy.

Mercy is what God has always wanted to see in His people who are supposed to be the earthly representatives of His likeness. It was Hosea who spoke on behalf of the Lord, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice, and knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings." Anyone can bring a lamb and offer it on the altar to try to be good for God or to get God to do good things for them. But to make yourself into the lamb being offered on the altar by allowing yourself to be humiliated so that others can know love is something altogether divine – only the nature of God can do.

Self-righteous people have difficulty with mercy. The Pharisees disdained Jesus for calling a Tax Collector and for eating with sinners. (See Matthew 9:13.) In one way, they were right. God did call His people to be holy. But Jesus rebuked them by quoting Hosea. God desires mercy. Similarly, Pharisees challenged Jesus for allowing His disciples to pluck grain on the Sabbath when this type of "work" should have been forbidden. (See Matthew 12:7.) By the letter of the Law, they were right. But again, Jesus rebuked them. God desires mercy.

James, the leader of the Jerusalem church and the author of the Book of James, taught believers about living lives of genuine mercy. The royal law is God's Old Covenant Law which was given through Moses. It has commands which must be obeyed in order to be righteous. But Jesus came to fulfill this Law for us so that we can be righteous by faith in Him. Thus, by His mercy, we have been set free from the demands of the royal law and have been called to a higher one – the "perfect" or mature law that gives liberty. This is the law by which we will be judged – whether or not we have exhibited the divine nature of God within us by showing mercy the way He does.

James 2:8-13: If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as

yourself," you are doing right. But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. **Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.**

James 1:25: But whoever looks intently into **the perfect law that gives freedom**, and continues in it--not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it--they will be blessed in what they do.

Jesus laid down His life for us so that we could be free. As His followers, He gave us only one command. This is His command:

John 15:12-17: **My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.** Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are My friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from My Father I have made known to you. You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit--fruit that will last--and so that whatever you ask in My name the Father will give you. **This is my command: Love each other.** (Also John 13:34-35.)

Without the nature of Jesus dwelling within us, it is absolutely impossible for anyone to fulfill His New Covenant command. Without participating in divine nature, we will be unable to love the way Jesus did. Spiritual fruitfulness and the evidence of our participation with divine nature has nothing to do with how many people we serve, how well we preach, teach, or lead worship, how rich or poor we are, how much revelation we have, or how much we sacrifice for God and His Kingdom. Any of us could do any of these things with a host of wrong motives. We may actually be aiming for recognition, revenge, success, expecting some form of repayment, or trying to earn a reward from God rather than being motivated by genuine love for God and for others. True spiritual fruit is produced through God's nature in our motives.

Galatians 5:22-23: But the **fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.** Against such things there is no law.

Therefore, when others sin against us, hurt us, offend us, cause us harm, or owe us something, we must recognize that their debt to us is small by comparison to the mercy that we have received from God. When we truly understand this, forgiving others comes easily. If we do not understand the mercy that we have received from God, it can be difficult to forgive others and therefore, we put ourselves in jeopardy of losing what Jesus died to give us. (see Matthew 18:23-35)

Matthew 6:14-15: "For **if you forgive** other people when they sin against you, **your heavenly Father will also forgive you.** But **if you do not forgive** others their sins, **your Father will not forgive your sins.**"

Mark 11:24-25: "Therefore I tell you, whatever you ask for in prayer, believe that you have received it, and it will be yours. And when you stand praying, if you hold anything against anyone, **forgive them, so that your Father in heaven may forgive you your sins.**"

Luke 11:4a: **Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive** everyone who sins against us.

What God desires is mercy. He wants to see His likeness reflected in us. Although miracle power, preaching, testifying, or even serving are all valid and good things, if we desire to demonstrate God's likeness to others, we must learn to show mercy.

LOVING YOUR ENEMIES

Matthew 5:43-45 NIV – "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous.

DESCRIPTION

While we were enemies of God and totally hostile to Him in our thoughts and actions, Christ died for us and forgave us completely. Now, as His followers, He calls upon us to love our enemies the way that He loved us when we were His enemies. Although we may not be nailed to a cross literally, it might require taking up our cross to suffer in order to release our enemies to freedom. This is the mercy that God desires for each of His children to have in our hearts.

Practicing participation in Loving Your Enemies is about working towards deep and genuine forgiveness and blessing in our hearts, even for those who have hurt us badly.

MEDITATION

Use these to reflect on God's mercy to you:

God does not make me earn His love. It is a free gift. While I was ungodly and an enemy of God, He loved me enough to die for me. God loves me without expecting anything in return. God does not hold a grudge against me and He remembers my sins no more. Jesus died to set me free from the things that kept me in bondage and hostile to Him. Nothing and no one can separate me from God's love for me or thwart God's plan for my life. When people do things to hurt or offend me, I reckon that part of me dead in Christ so I am free to love them without reservation.



PURPOSE:

To reveal God's nature in us by loving our enemies.

To love, bless, and pray for those who have treated us shamefully.

To forgive as Christ has forgiven us.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:

Godliness. Mercy. Forgiveness.

Freedom from bitterness, resentment, accusations against others.

Growing in genuine love for others without partiality.

PRAYER

Father, thank you that you sent your Son Jesus to die for me when I was your enemy. Help me now to be like you by blessing, praying for, and loving my enemies. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRACTICE

- Write a list of the people who have hurt you or who you would consider to be your "enemies."
 - Those who cursed or slandered you, denigrated, abused, or humiliated you, misunderstood or wounded you through their words or actions, etc.
- Consider the ways that your enemy's treatment of you triggered unloving, unforgiving, or ungodly reactions in you.
 - Does it spike in you offense, anger, pride, self-defensiveness; jealousy, competition, selfish ambition; revenge, withdrawal, or wanting their downfall, etc.
- By faith, take up your cross and reckon that part of you dead in Christ. (See Galatians 2:20; Romans 6:11.)
 - You are dead to yourself by faith. Dead people aren't offended or angry; competitive or vengeful, etc.
- One enemy at a time, ask the Holy Spirit to work in your heart towards genuine and total forgiveness and blessing. Use the following as a guide:
 - Father God, in Jesus' name, I pray for _____.
 - Father, thank you that you love _____ and sent Jesus to die for _____ to forgive all their sins, as you did mine.
 - Father, in Jesus' name, I forgive _____ and release them totally from the harm they have done to me.
 - Father, in Jesus' name, I ask you to bless and prosper _____'s life, family, health, and the work of their hands.
 - Father, in Jesus' name, show me how to love _____ in word and in deed the way that you love me.

NOTES:



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

- Romans 5:6-10
- Colossians 1:21-23
- Leviticus 19:18
- Matthew 18:23-35
- 1 John 4:21
- Matthew 5:21-22
- Romans 12:19-20
- Luke 23:34
- Matthew 9:13

BE PERFECT – BE MERCIFUL



Matthew 5:43-48 NIV - You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous: If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

Luke 6:33-36 NIV - And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

DESCRIPTION

We all want to receive a perfect score when we stand before God. Jesus says that to be perfect (the same word for mature) is to love our enemies and those who hate us, even when they are ungrateful and wicked. If Jesus waited for us to deserve His kindness, He would still be waiting to come. Instead, He came to save us when we had gone astray. He paid the price for us, knowing we can never possibly repay Him. He died for us when we were dead in sin. He continues to love us through our fears, failures, missteps, and rebellion. Now, He asks us to be like Him. The Holy Spirit will help us to do what none of us can do unless Christ is in us. This is the way towards perfection. Practicing Be Perfect – Be Merciful is about showing others the mercy and kindness that Jesus has shown to us when so that they can know His love.

PURPOSE:

To love people the way God loves.

To be empowered by the Holy Spirit for revealing the mercy of Christ.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:

Love, Mercy, Increasing in patience, selflessness, humility, and compassion.

Reduction of criticism, judgmentalism, self-righteousness.

PRAYER

Father, thank you that you sent Jesus to give His life for me when I did not deserve it and could not repay you. Teach me how to love those who I consider unworthy. Show me how to be perfect like you. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CONSIDERATION

Why is it so tempting to want mercy for ourselves and judgment for others? How is God changing your heart on this? Have you tended toward being lenient (passive/lawless) or severe (legalistic/religious)? Which one is God emphasizing in your life right now? What is God's perspective on this?

PRACTICE

- Remember a time when you were not fully following Jesus.
 - How were you trying/hoping to solve your own problems?
 - What was the result of your attempts/solutions?
 - Why were you in need of a Savior?
- Consider someone in your life who you consider to be sinful, wicked, rude, ungrateful, or otherwise unworthy of blessing.
 - Why do you think what they are doing is unacceptable to God? How is it different than what you did?
 - Why do they need a Savior?

- Ask the Lord to reveal to you how He wants you to bless them without condemning them or condoning their sin. Do what He says.

- Take note of any resistance that comes up in your heart.
 - Ask the Lord to help you identify the root of this resistance.
 - Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to obey God and bless them in spite of your natural resistance.
 - Take note of what happens in your heart when you obey God by blessing them.

- Keep the person in prayer with your new heart of mercy.

NOTES:



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

- Colossians 1:21
- Romans 5:8
- John 15:12
- 1 Corinthians 13
- John 8:11
- John 3:17
- John 5:14
- Ephesians 5:2
- 1 John 3:16-18
- 1 John 4:20-21

FORGIVENESS INSPECTION

<i>1 = Needs improvement</i>	<i>2 = In Refining Process</i>	<i>3 = Doing Well for Now</i>	
Am I thankful that Christ died for my sins?	1	2	3
Do I recognize my own need to be forgiven for things I do wrong?	1	2	3
Am I able to acknowledge that even though my intentions are good, my actions are not always right?	1	2	3
Do I move forward trusting that God's mercies to me are new every morning?	1	2	3
Have I forgiven those who hurt me in the past?	1	2	3
When someone wrongs me, do I allow God to avenge me?	1	2	3
When someone wrongs me, do I "punish" or pay them back through acts of revenge, spitefulness, withdrawal of affection, or the silent treatment?	1	2	3
When someone hurts me, do I expose them to others through gossip or slander even in the form of "prayer request"?	1	2	3
When someone wrongs me do I communicate with them directly and follow the protocols laid out by Jesus according to Matthew 18:15-17?	1	2	3
When someone wrongs or hurts me, do I forgive them?	1	2	3
Is forgiving others easy for me?	1	2	3
Do I forgive freely, without expecting repayment or restitution?	1	2	3
Do I need to "understand" in order to forgive, or do I forgive because God forgave me?	1	2	3
Am I willing to forgive even if it costs me something?	1	2	3
Do I withdraw myself without communicating to the offender that they have hurt me?	1	2	3
Do I pretend to forgive others just to avoid conflict?	1	2	3
Do I hold a grudge?	1	2	3
Do I rejoice in my "enemy's" tragedy?	1	2	3
When I forgive someone, do I consider myself spiritually superior or look down on them for "not knowing what they are doing?"	1	2	3
When I forgive someone who has wronged me, do release them entirely and continue to love them? (Without putting them on probation period.)	1	2	3
When I forgive someone who has wronged me, do I let it go without bringing it up again to remind them of their fault?	1	2	3
Do I sincerely pray for and love my enemies and those who treat me shamefully?	1	2	3
<i>Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times. Matthew 18:21-22</i>			

SUITABLE FOR SERVICE

Even though Jesus is Lord, He did not come to lord over people. He came to serve them and give His life as a ransom for their souls. He did not come to serve His own appetites but He always made sure that everyone around Him had plenty to eat. He did not come to demand worship but to demonstrate what true worship is by offering Himself entirely to God. He humbled Himself and took on the nature of a servant, subjecting Himself entirely to His Father's will at all times.

We are made for good works which God prepared in advance for us and God wants us to be zealous for good works and serving Him by serving others. (See Ephesians 2:8-10; Titus 2:14.) This said, we can never allow ourselves to be so consumed with serving God by doing things for Him that we forget to allow His nature to penetrate ever more deeply into our own lives. Jesus loved Martha but said that Mary chose the one thing that was needed. (See Luke 10:38-42.) Even though the apostle Paul had served and trained so many other people, he recognized the need for spiritual discipline in his life and maintaining his own connection with the heart of God so that he would not be disqualified from the eternal prize. He compared ministry service to running a race. It is a marathon, not a sprint. We need to maintain our own grasp of God and perseverance in the truth because our souls and the souls of others are at stake.

*1 Corinthians 9:24-27: Do you not know that in a race all the runners run, but only one gets the prize? **Run in such a way as to get the prize.** Everyone who competes in the games goes into **strict training.** They do it to get a crown that will not last, but we do it to get a crown that will last forever. Therefore **I do not run like someone running aimlessly; I do not fight like a boxer beating the air. No, I strike a blow to my body and make it my slave so that after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified for the prize.***

*1 Timothy 4:16: **Watch your life and doctrine closely.** Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.*

Jesus came to fulfill the eternal will of God – not to enslave Himself to the temporal needs of men, or even His own needs. Even though God came to earth in the flesh, people still died. There continued to be the poor, the sick, and the orphan, and corruption continued in people's hearts and the governments of the world. Knowing that He was going to be crucified, Jesus could have taken up the cause of abolishing the death penalty but instead, He proclaimed one message: Repent – the Kingdom of God is at hand.

Many people do many wonderful things in the name of the Lord. But not everyone "working for the Lord" is actually working with the Lord and doing His will. Some people are very "anointed" with power for miracles, prophetic gifts, or revelation for teaching. But many of these will stand before Jesus and discover that they have been working iniquity. (See Matthew 7:21-23.) Many people are running to and fro after every whim and demand of the people. Others are chasing after opportunities to build their ministry or make a name for themselves. Some people are simply eager to demonstrate their own gifts and revelation or to feel needed. But their service to others is actually self-service in disguise.

Jesus taught that we will know the real workers by the fruit they reveal in their lives. There is a difference between works and fruit. There is a difference between anointing and fruit. There is a difference between service and fruit. The question is always whether the works, anointing, and service are for God, from God, and from a sincere heart of devotion to God. Anyone running about "serving God" without actually knowing Him, being transformed by Him, and submitting themselves to His guidance is beating the air.

Along these lines, Paul noted that a runner running a race must run the race according to the rules and he gave some indication as to what those rules are for people in ministry service. In his letters to Timothy and Titus, Paul urged them not to rush into appointing people to leadership before their character had been revealed, tested, and proven. Here are some of the attributes Paul listed of those qualified for leadership service.

1 Timothy 3:1-13: Here is a trustworthy saying: Whoever aspires to be an overseer desires a noble task. Now the overseer is to be above reproach, faithful to his wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. He must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. (If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God's church?) He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgment as the devil. He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap. In the same way, deacons are to be worthy of respect, sincere, not indulging in much wine, and not pursuing dishonest gain. They must keep hold of the deep truths of the faith with a clear conscience. They must first be tested; and then if there is nothing against them, let them serve as deacons. In the same way, the women are to be worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything. A deacon must be faithful to his wife and must manage his children and his household well. Those who have served well gain an excellent standing and great assurance in their faith in Christ Jesus.

See also, 1 Timothy 5; 2 Timothy 2; Titus 1.

Servants of God are just that – servants. Their character, nature, and motive of all work will ultimately be tested by God and revealed for how genuine it has truly been according to God's will and purposes.

*1 Corinthians 3:11-15: For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. **If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, their work will be shown for what it is,** because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the **fire will test the quality of each person's work.** If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved--even though only as one escaping through the flames.*

The basis of all genuine ministry is Jesus Christ. Any so-called ministry built on anything else is not ordained by God. Moreover, only service to God which is fully led and empowered by the Holy Spirit will prove itself to be gold, silver, and precious stones which stand the test of fire and receive a reward. Service to God which is done out of other motives or by human strength will prove itself to be wood, hay, or straw and will have no eternal value – no matter how “good,” “godly,” or “in fulfillment of God's word” we may think it to be. Consider that Abraham was allowed to produce an Ishmael by his own flesh but that resulted in heartache for him. By contrast, that Jesus did not rush as the Savior-on-call when Lazarus was dying but waited several days before making His way to where Lazarus was. (See John 11.)

Jesus was at all times submitted to the will of His Father, saying only what He heard the Father saying, teaching only what the Father taught, and doing only what He saw the Father doing with the right character and motive. In everything He did, He represented and exhibited the nature of His Father. Let us grow in our submission to God and allow Him to transform our hearts and lives to be like Jesus so that we produce good fruit, walk in the good works that God has ordained for us, and ultimately receive the reward for our service.

SUITABLE FOR SERVICE - EVALUATION

“If anyone aspires to the office of overseer [leadership], he desires a noble task.” 1 Timothy 3:1

1 = Needs Refining

2 = In Refining Process

3 = Purified by Fire

Blameless. Above reproach, impossible to charge with offense.	1	2	3	Not lover of money, not covetous, not greedy or eager for gain	1	2	3
Husband of one wife	1	2	3	Not teaching for gain	1	2	3
Sober-minded, abstaining from alcohol entirely or moderate use	1	2	3	Not recent convert, novice, newly planted, new, young, recently born	1	2	3
Self-controlled, curbing desires and impulses	1	2	3	Not double-tongued, saying different things to different people (to deceive)	1	2	3
In right mind, sane, moderate	1	2	3	No depravity, riots, excess, prodigality	1	2	3
Respectable, good behavior, modest, well arranged, orderly	1	2	3	Not insubordinate, unruly, disobedient, rebellious, unable to control	1	2	3
Hospitable, generous to guests	1	2	3	Not arrogant, self-willed, self-pleasing	1	2	3
Able to teach, skillful in teaching				Not quick tempered, prone to anger	1	2	3
Gentle, patient, moderate, fair, equitable, mild, appropriate	1	2	3	Not deceivers (religion/error), seducer, misleading others	1	2	3
Manages own household well	1	2	3	Not empty/idle talk, of senseless things	1	2	3
Children are submissive, under control, in subjection, subordinate	1	2	3	Not lazy, idle, shunning work one ought to perform, ineffective	1	2	3
Good reputation with outsiders, witness, testimony, record	1	2	3	Not quarrelsome with words, physical force, or litigation/lawsuits	1	2	3
Dignified, honest, good character	1	2	3	Not a liar, one who breaks faith	1	2	3
Lover of good, promoter of virtue	1	2	3	Not glutton, belly, living for stomach	1	2	3
Holy, devout, undefiled by evil	1	2	3	Not promoting myths, fables, clichés	1	2	3
Patient when wronged, forbearing	1	2	3	Hates a bribe	1	2	3
Full of the Holy Spirit and wisdom	1	2	3	Disciplined, robust, restraining lusts	1	2	3
Able to instruct in right doctrine, comfort, exhort to one's side	1	2	3	Able to rebuke (tell one's fault) to those who contradict	1	2	3
Rendering justice to others in manner of dealing with them	1	2	3	Trustworthy	1	2	3

Deacon: Greek: *diakonos*, meaning “servant”

Elder: Greek: *presbuteros*, meaning “aged, mature”

Responsibilities: To tend to the physical needs among the believers. To free up the apostles and elders for their work in the ministry, and for study of the Word and prayer.

Responsibilities: To pastor or shepherd God's church, meaning to feed, lead, guide, and nurture. To administrate, rule, and represent the Church. To teach and preach. To pray for the sick.

*Based on 1 Timothy 3, 5; 2 Timothy 2; Titus 1; 1 Peter 5; Acts 6, 20; James 5; Exodus 18:21

PRAY, OBEY, WALK AWAY

Mark 1:38 NIV - Jesus replied, "Let us go somewhere else—to the nearby villages—so I can preach there also. That is why I have come."

DESCRIPTION

Serving God is a wonderful thing. It is such a joy to serve God by serving others who are in need of His various types of service, love, compassion, and help. If we never sense the unction from the Lord to serve others, we may not be listening to the Holy Spirit. On the other hand, if we serve others beyond what God has asked of us, we will burn out.

Each of us need to keep our spiritual "gas tank" full by keeping our eyes and Jesus and spending time with Him to be refilled with His Spirit.

As such, **praying**, **Obey**, **Walk Away** into practice is about seeking the Lord for His direction about what He wants us to do for anyone in any situation so that we can do His will: nothing more, nothing less.

CONSIDERATIONS

Has there been a time when you "blessed" someone with your mouth but did nothing to actually help them? Have you ever served someone to the extent that you became entangled in their issues or demands until it became a hindrance to your own walk with God? Have you ever been "burned out" from ministry? In hindsight, how did it happen?

In what ways did **Jesus Pray**, **Obey**, and **Walk Away**? Who did He take His directions from? Did He give people what they demanded or what they needed?

PRAYER

Father, thank you that you sent Jesus to demonstrate love and obedience. Teach me how to listen to what you want me to do for others and to willingly do it without adding to or subtracting from your guidance. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRACTICE

1. Ask the Lord to highlight someone to you who He wants you to serve in some way.
2. **PRAY:** Ask the Lord what He wants you to do for the person.
 - Resist the urge to come up with your own ideas of what they need or what you could do for them.
 - Accept if God limits your involvement to praying for them without engaging directly with them.
 - Be willing to do what God says even if He asks you to do something you do not like to do.
 - Listen to the Lord for His instructions.
3. **OBEY:** Do whatever the Lord told you to do for this person.
 - Do not add anything or take anything away from what God told you to do.
 - Do what God told you to do secretly if possible. If it is not possible to do it secretly, be sure to give God all the glory for giving you the idea of what they needed.
 - Resist the urge to linger on the subject once you have obeyed God.
4. **WALK AWAY:** Excuse yourself or move on so that their gratitude goes only to God.
 - Resist the urge to consider yourself to be "involved" in their situation.
 - Do not do anything further in the situation unless and until God tells you to do so.
 - Move on and go back to Step One. If the Lord highlights the same person to you again, do what He says. If the Lord does not highlight the same person again, do not further involve yourself.
5. Praise the Lord for helping you to care for people without going beyond His instructions. Thank Him that the works and rest He guides you in keep you filled and ready for service.

NOTES:



PURPOSE:
To love others well.
To do the good works God has prepared for us without going beyond what God ordained.
To love others without creating co-dependence or becoming their savior.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:
Love for others.
Wisdom and discernment of what the will of the Lord is for us in various situations.
Readiness to serve God and others.
Godly boundaries for ourselves and with others.



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:
James 2:16
Matthew 7:12
1 John 3:17
Matthew 15:35-36
Deuteronomy 15:7
1 John 4:20
Mary/Martha Luke 10:38-42

MOTIVATIONAL GIFTS OF THE FATHER

When we offer our lives in service to God, He will lead us into serving others. His desire for us to bear His image as a reflection of His divine nature so that He is glorified. He is a good Father who equips us and gifts us with everything we need to do what He has asked of us. God's spiritual gifts are not about us being gifted. They are about Him and us representing Him to others as we serve them.

The Book of Romans, Chapter 12, is all about motives. Believers are urged to offer themselves completely to the will of God in service to Him which is done from a sincere heart with the right motives.

Romans 12:9-21: Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality. Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Paul lists these attributes of genuine love **after** his explanation of spiritual gifts but they serve as the evidence that we are actually functioning from God's divine nature as we flow in these gifts. In fact, the spiritual gifts listed in this chapter are called "motivational" because they pertain to the character of the one using the gifts. Each person has been given various gifts according to the grace of God to serve other members of the Body.

*Romans 12:4-8: 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 **giving**, then give generously; if it is to **lead**, do it diligently; if it is to show **mercy**, do it cheerfully.*

Not everyone has the same role and function just like the hand and the foot of a natural body do not have the same function. This said, the hand and the foot are motivated to keep the whole body and all of its parts in top functionality – in fact, their very sustenance depends on it.

Motivated by Love

These motivational gifts have been distributed by God, our Father. As He works His own nature in us, these gifts flow from the Father's heart of love and compassion for people. The Father's heart is nurturing, truthful,

selfless, and willing to do all that is required to train up a child in the way they should go and nurture His nature in them. As such, let us consider what these gifts look like from a parent's heart motivated by love and nurturing development to maturity.

Prophesying: A good parent teaches us right from wrong, warns us when we are getting off track or doing something wrong, encourages us when we are doing well or need a boost of courage, and talks with us about the outcomes of our choices and the things to come in the future.

Serving: A good parent cooks our meals, dresses us, changes our dirty diapers, notices what we need as we grow through different phases of life and enter into various projects and challenges, and helps us do things that we cannot do for ourselves or need assistance with.

Teaching: A good parent teaches us our A,B,C's and right from wrong, equips us with knowledge and skills we will need to succeed, guides us into the truth, and helps us understand the important things of life for surviving and thriving in this world.

Encouraging/Exhortation: A good parent speaks the truth in love to us, admonishes us to stay on the right path, do the right things at the right time with the right people and, with a positive outlook about our potential, helps us to set goals and cheers us on to attaining them.

Giving: A good parent willingly provides the best that they can for us, notices what we need and delights to supply it for us, and will willingly spend their last dime to make sure that we have what we need without begrudging us for costing them something.

Leading: A good parent leads by example and steers the whole family in the right direction, establishes solid boundaries and a predictable rhythm of life so that we feel safe and secure, gives discipline when we step out of bounds, and delegates responsibilities among the family and expects everyone to fulfill those responsibilities. Their objective is for the household to run well and for each person to be on the path to becoming a responsible adult who is capable of ruling our own house someday.

Mercy: A good parent comforts us when we are hurting, feels our pain as if it is their own, forgives us when we make mistakes or behave badly, continues to accept and love us even if we continue to do wrong, and will do anything to help us get ourselves back on the right path. A good parent never gives up.

As God allows and enables us to flow in any of these motivational gifts, we will love the children of God as if they are our own children, pouring ourselves out to them in kindness, hope, and desire for their good. Note: This does not mean that we assume parental authority in their lives, but is more aimed at tapping into the tireless, unending stream of love flowing from the Father's heart in these various ways.

Jesus' Example

Every believer has been gifted by God for service through these motivational gifts. Personally, I believe they are part of how God designed us in the womb. Even unbelievers will demonstrate aptitude in certain areas of care for others or an ease of willingness or ability to serve in certain ways. But until we are flowing in these gifts from the unending resources of God's love, it is unsanctified and fleshly.

Typically, we will have predominant gifts which seem to be our default mode and comes more easily to us. But Jesus demonstrated that spiritual maturity includes being able to function with any of these motives depending on what the situation demands based on the person we are serving. Let's look at how Jesus functioned in these gifts.

Prophecy: At the well, Jesus perceived the truth about the woman's marital situation and spoke it plainly. He perceived that Nathanael was an honest man of integrity. Jesus discerned that Satan was speaking through Peter and rebuked him sharply. He talked to His followers about what was to come, warned them about the hazards of following Him, and informed them of the rewards of it.

Serving: Jesus had compassion on the crowd who had not eaten and stayed longer to make sure they were fed. He stayed behind to dismiss the crowd while His disciples went on to the next place. Jesus took the lowest place and was not ashamed to do dirty work – He washed the feet of His disciples.

Teaching: Jesus was always teaching. He taught in the synagogues, in the fields, on the mountains, and at the Temple. He had compassion for the people because they were like sheep without a shepherd and so, He taught them many things. He wanted them to learn the ways of God and eternal life.

Encouraging/Exhortation: The Sermon on the Mount is a gigantic exhortation to right living in the Kingdom of God. Jesus also consistently promoted and prodded His disciples towards right responses and behavior, including warning them about how to behave in situations they had not yet faced.

Giving: Jesus gave up the splendor of heaven to come to earth and be born in a manger. Jesus gave generously to the poor as part of His ministry but more significantly, He gave His life – all of Himself, holding nothing back – for the sake of our salvation.

Leading: Jesus led by example of perfect Godly character in His application of truth and mercy. He carved out a new path and called His followers to set a new course for their lives which aligned with God's purposes. He trained His disciples in the ways of God and then delegated responsibility to them, giving them clear commands and instructions for how He wanted them to carry out His commission.

Mercy: Even though Jesus knew that God had given Him the right to judge, He instead chose to show mercy. He forgave sin, healed the sick, was a friend to sinners, and took the brutal punishment He did not deserve while extending forgiveness to the ones killing Him.

As we become more like Jesus by submitting ourselves to the Holy Spirit, we will be able to function from any one of these motives at the right time and in the right way so that we constantly reflect God's image to the people we are with.

But again, God's spiritual gifts are about Him and representing Him, not about us being gifted. If we think we are gifted in some area and set out to serve others with "our" gift, we are likely to do the exact opposite of what God wants in any given situation. For example, someone wanting to exhibit "their" gift of prophecy and truth-telling might rebuke someone who really needs a touch of mercy. Or vice versa, someone who only knows how to flow in the gift of mercy might show mercy to someone who really needs a prophetic rebuke. You get the picture. The only way to be like Jesus is to do things the way that He did – which is to be totally submitted to God at all times, being led by the Holy Spirit in all situations and serving people the way God guides in the moment.

Therefore, as we flow in motivational gifts, let us all aim to bear God's image and be motivated rightly in our exercise of the gifts God has given us for His purposes and for His glory.

GENUINE LOVE INSPECTION

1 = Needs improvement	2 = In Refining Process	3 = Doing Well for Now
Genuine Love = Based on Romans 12:9-21.		
I am sincere.	1 2 3	I rejoice with those who rejoice. style="text-align: center;">1 2 3
I hate what is evil.	1 2 3	I mourn with those who mourn. style="text-align: center;">1 2 3
I cling to what is good.	1 2 3	I live in harmony with others. style="text-align: center;">1 2 3
I am devoted to others in love.	1 2 3	I am not proud. style="text-align: center;">1 2 3
I honor others over myself.	1 2 3	I associate with the lowly. style="text-align: center;">1 2 3
I am not lacking in zeal or fervor.	1 2 3	I am not conceited. style="text-align: center;">1 2 3
I am joyful in hope.	1 2 3	I do not repay evil for evil. style="text-align: center;">1 2 3
I am patient in affliction.	1 2 3	I do what is right. style="text-align: center;">1 2 3
I am faithful in prayer.	1 2 3	I live at peace with everyone. style="text-align: center;">1 2 3
I share with the needy.	1 2 3	I do not take revenge. style="text-align: center;">1 2 3
I practice hospitality.	1 2 3	I bless my enemies. style="text-align: center;">1 2 3
I bless my persecutors.	1 2 3	I am not overcome by evil. style="text-align: center;">1 2 3
		I overcome evil with good. style="text-align: center;">1 2 3
<p><i>Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 1 John 4:7</i></p>		

MOTIVATION: PROPHECY

Romans 12:6 NIV –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;

MOTIVATIONAL GIFTS

The Spiritual Gifts in the book of Romans pertain to our way of doing things or our mode of conduct in our interactions with others. Each one is an expression of God's love. Jesus demonstrated that it is possible for us to function in any of these gifts as the situation calls for when we serve others. Note: These gifts are different than those in Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12.

DESCRIPTION

This gift of Prophecy could be summarized as, "I love you enough to tell you the truth." This gift is one of God's ways of speaking through us with His discernment and loving guidance for right and wrong, including warnings or exhortations towards the future. Jesus demonstrated this gift in the way He perceived things accurately and spoke truthfully into the lives and situations of others. He knew what people did and what they thought even if they were not speaking. He knew what people needed to do to align themselves with God and He told them. His main message was, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand."

This gift is from the heart of God and carries no desire to tear people down. Even in challenging situations or when confronting sin, this gift is motivated by helping others to see the truth in order to be restored and to advance in their life with God. We do this in proportion to how strong our faith is in the message from God. Evidence of mature development of this gift is the ability to accurately and supernaturally discern what is happening in the lives of others and to deliver a straightforward message from the Lord which sheds light on the situation for the recipient. It will come without a hint of condemnation and be full of love.



PURPOSE:

To speak the truth of God into the lives of others.

To discern situations accurately so that we can help others align with God's will.

To represent God as His spokesperson and convey His insights or instructions to people.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:

Speaking the truth in love.

Correct discernment of good and evil.

Compassion coupled with words of restoration and redemption.

Considerate warnings and rebukes to those who need correction.

PRAYER

Father, thank you that Jesus had perfect discernment and delivery of truth in every situation He faced. Help me to grow in this motivational gift of prophecy so that I can see correctly and help guide others in your truth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRACTICE

- Ask the Holy Spirit to highlight a challenging situation in the life of someone you know.
 - Write down your view of the situation, the facts which led up to it, and where you see things going if it continues.
 - Take note of your thoughts and feelings about the situation. Are you angry, sad, frustrated, scared, etc.?
- Now, ask the Holy Spirit to give you very clear (black & white) discernment of good & evil in this situation. Consider:
 - Who is this person? Where are they coming from? Why?
 - Is this a result of sin/obedience: unbelief/fairfulness: arrogance/ignorance/wrong beliefs; unfortunate events? What does God's Word say regarding His will about this?
- Take a moment to remember that Jesus died for this person to be forgiven and free by grace through faith. Then:
 - Ask God to give you His heart for them and His insights into the situation. (Notice how this may be different than your own thoughts and feelings about it.)
 - Ask God to tell you what is needed for alignment with His will. This could include things like repentance, faith, patience, endurance, or specific actions/instructions, etc.
 - Ask Him about the outcome He foresees, desires for them, or promises in His Word. (Use Scripture wisely.)
- Share the insights from God with the person directly. Do this according to the faith you have that you have heard God.
 - If your faith in the message is not strong, cushion your delivery with, "I sense that the Lord **might be** saying..."
 - If you have strong faith for prophesying, deliver it gently but clearly with boldness but without condemnation.

NOTES:



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

- Woman of Well:
- John 4:4-26
- Nathaniel:
- John 1:47-51
- Luke 5:22
- Matthew 23
- Hebrews 5:14
- John 8:44-45
- Luke 11:17-19
- 2 Timothy 4:1-4
- Luke 3:3-20
- Amos 7:14-16...
- Ezekiel 2:1-10

MOTIVATION: SERVING

Romans 12:6-7 NIV – We have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us... If it is serving, then serve.

MOTIVATIONAL GIFTS

The Spiritual Gifts in the book of Romans pertain to our way of doing things or our mode of conduct in our interactions with others. Each one is an expression of God's love. Jesus demonstrated that it is possible for us to function in any of these gifts as the situation calls for when we serve others. Note: These gifts are different than those in Ephesians 4 and 1 Corinthians 12.

DESCRIPTION

This gift of Serving could be summarized as, "I love you enough to help you and take care of your needs."

God loves through us by helping us to notice the needs of others and help them through serving them. Jesus made it abundantly clear that He came to serve not to be served. Our humble king washed the filthy feet of His disciples. He noticed the hunger of the people who had come to hear Him speak and made sure their bellies were full before going home. He told a parable about sheep and goats that those who serve the least are the ones who reflect His heart.

The word used to describe this gift of serving is the same word for Deacon which literally means waiter. Functioning in this gift (whether serving food or not) is like being a waiter in a restaurant. A waiter notices and serves basic needs, remembers special requests, is willing to go the extra mile to make the experience pleasant, and has stamina for completing the task. However, like Jesus, our true service is for God. He was never enslaved to the demands of men.

Evidence of mature development of this gift is the ability to notice the needs of others and meet them according to God's will and purposes. It will come without a hint of self-aggrandizing or subjugation and will be full of willingness, compassion, and love.



PURPOSE:

To notice the needs of others and help them according to God's will.

To humbly serve others rather than looking to be served.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:

- Speaking the truth in love.
- Correct discernment of good and evil.
- Compassion coupled with words of restoration and redemption.
- Considerate warnings and rebukes to those who need correction.

PRAYER

Father, thank you that Jesus came not to be served but to serve. Help me to grow in this motivational gift of serving so that I can notice and attend to the needs of your people with your grace. In Jesus' name, Amen.

CONSIDERATIONS

Do you typically like to serve or be served? Why?

Is it challenging for you to notice the needs of others? Or to serve the needs of others? How so?

PRACTICE

1. Ask the Holy Spirit to highlight one person in your life to practice serving. If you are married, choose your spouse.
 - Are they struggling to accomplish something?
 - Do they have any projects that are delayed due to inability to make time or need of assistance?
 - What chores do they have that need to be done?
 - What errands do they need to do? ...Etc. etc.
2. Each day for one week, take note of their needs such as:
 - Are they struggling to accomplish something?
 - Do they have any projects that are delayed due to inability to make time or need of assistance?
 - What chores do they have that need to be done?
 - What errands do they need to do? ...Etc. etc.
3. After one week of noticing, present your findings to Jesus.
 - Ask God to highlight the one thing that you can do to serve this person which would mean the most to them.
 - If you are capable of doing this thing, ask God to show you how He wants you to do it for them.
 - If you are not capable of doing this thing, ask God to help you make arrangements for it to be done or ask God to highlight something else from your list.
 - Ask God to give you a willing heart which desires to serve.
4. Do what God has shown you to do to serve this person.
 - Serve them with a willing heart, not a grudging one.
 - If possible, do it quietly without announcing it to them.
 - Do it without expecting anything in return, just to serve.
 - When they thank you, give God all the glory for it!

NOTES:



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

Washing Feet: John 13:1-17

Feeding Hungry: Matthew 15:32

Deacons: Acts 6:1-6

Matthew 20:28

Mark 10:45

Philippians 2:7

Luke 10:38-42

UNIT THREE – KEY QUESTIONS

Divine Nature

Use this worksheet to test your grasp of the material and exercises of Unit Three.

How do believers participate with God's divine nature? (in your own words)	
WHY and HOW do we render our hearts to God?	Whose responsibility is it to crucify our flesh?
How is spiritual fruit produced?	Why is mercy an important reflection of God's nature?
What is the difference between fruit and works?	What is the motivation of spiritual gifts?
What is one thing you learned that you did not know before?	What questions do you still have about this subject?

UNIT THREE: GROUP EXERCISES

Option One:

Share with one another what you discovered through the Motive Inspection & Forgiveness Inspection. Pray for one another to become more like Christ and a reflection of God's divine nature.

AND/OR

Option Two:

Put the Motivational Gift Exercises for Prophecy and Serving into practice in a group setting.