

UNIT THREE: COMMUNITY OF GOD

KEY SCRIPTURE VERSE FOR UNIT THREE

You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. For in Scripture it says: "See, I lay a stone in Zion, a chosen and precious cornerstone, and the one who trusts in him will never be put to shame." - 1 Peter 2:5-6

CLASS 1: A HOLY KINGDOM

1 Reading, 1 Exercise, 1 Scripture List

By faith, we have become a holy people who are included in the New Covenant and partake of the life of God. We are a new generation chosen by God to be His treasured possession. We are a holy Kingdom.

CLASS 2: SET APART PEOPLE

1 Reading, 1 Scripture Worksheet

Through faith, we have been set apart from this world in order to submit ourselves to the ways of God who has given authority to the Church.

CLASS 3: FELLOWSHIP

1 Reading, 1 Scripture Worksheet

In Christ, believers have been united as ONE body with many members. We belong to one another and partner together to see the plans of God fulfilled in us.

CLASS 4: ONE ANOTHER

1 Scripture Reading, 1 Exercise

More than a Kingdom, a Nation, or a partnership, believers are brothers and sisters in the household of God. We are called to love one another, giving preference to one another over others.

KEY QUESTIONS

GROUP EXERCISES

A HOLY KINGDOM*

Thousands of years ago, the one and only God who created heaven and earth redeemed a kingdom for Himself. His design was for them to be holy, meaning special to Him, and unique among all the nations as His people. Through this kingdom, His goodness and power could be revealed to the rest of the world.

The events we read about in the Old Testament Scriptures are a prophetic shadow that reveals God's greater work of redemption and points us to His Son, Jesus Christ. In other words, what we see in the Old Testament in the natural is what we have spiritually in the New Covenant. For example, in the Old Testament we see literal battles and wars in earthly territories whereas in the New Covenant our fight is not against flesh and blood but against spiritual forces of evil in heavenly places. (See Ephesians 6:12.)

In light of this, in one event, the Passover is the most poignant example of the whole story God is telling about His eternal redemption of mankind through Christ, our eternal Passover Lamb.

*1 Corinthians 5:7b - For Christ, **our Passover lamb**, has been sacrificed.*

*1 Peter 1:18-19 - For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your ancestors, but with the precious blood of Christ, **a lamb without blemish or defect.***

*John 1:29 - The next day John saw Jesus coming toward him and said, "Look, **the Lamb of God**, who takes away the sin of the world!"*

Understanding the original Passover story gives us insight into the eternal story God is telling about how He redeemed us to be His Holy Kingdom. Jesus was crucified on the anniversary of Passover in a parallel of events over one thousand years later. A whole new people of God was born in a day. In spite of the fact that we are all over the earth, we who believe Jesus are a special people, bound together like one nation united under the same King with the same God.

Read in your Bible, from the Book of Exodus, Chapters 12 through 14. You will read in these chapters about God's miraculous deliverance of the Israelites from four hundred years of slavery in the land of Egypt.

To recap: On the tenth day of the month, every family was ordered to select an unblemished lamb from their flock and bring it into their home. Then, on the fourteenth day of the month, they were to slaughter that lamb at twilight, paint the blood of the lamb on the doorpost of their home, and eat the lamb with unleavened bread. They did all of this as God had commanded through Moses, and then God sent the destroyer to bring judgment on Egypt by killing all their first born. God *passed over* the doors which were marked with the blood of the lamb so that the destroyer did not and could not touch the faithful Israelites. No foreigner was allowed to participate in it unless they were circumcised because circumcision was the symbol of the Israelite's special relationship with God and had been ever since God's covenant with their ancestor Abraham. In the middle of the night, the Israelites began walking out of Egypt and away from their lives as slaves. Then, on the third day, God parted the waters of the Red Sea and the Israelites walked through on dry ground. Finally, the waters closed back up to separate them from their enemies forever. There were most likely about two million of them, including a mixed multitude of gentiles who came with them. Those who believed made it through the waters of the Red Sea unscathed and they all rejoiced.

This was the birth of their nation. The Jewish people still celebrate Passover every year to commemorate what God did for them. It is also noted frequently throughout the Scriptures as the most significant day in the Israelite's history as God's people to remind them of His love, redemption, and power.

*Exodus 19:5b-6a: Out of all nations **you will be my treasured possession**. Although the whole earth is mine, **you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation**.*

Fast forward to the week of the Passover celebration in the last days of Jesus' life on earth. On the tenth day of the month, Jesus rode into Jerusalem presenting Himself as the unblemished Lamb who was about to be sacrificed. Then, on the fourteenth day of the month, He was arrested and sentenced to be crucified/slaughtered. While He was on the cross, judgment was passed on Him in our place. Every enemy of mankind was placed upon Him including every sin, curse, sickness, punishment, and every oppression of the devil. The destroyer was allowed to destroy Jesus on the cross. He shed His blood and died, and He descended into the eternal fiery inferno, the pit of hell. But then on the third day, God raised Him from the dead. At daybreak, He walked out of the tomb in an imperishable resurrection body to live forever. He was once and for all separated from His enemies. This was the birth of a whole new kind of people: a spiritual people, an eternal people who will never die. The stone of the tomb had been rolled away just like the waters of the Red Sea had been for the people of Israel. Jesus walked out of the grave and all of us who believe were included with Him. This is the event we remember every time we take communion to celebrate forever what Jesus did for us and remember how because of God's great love and by His great power, He delivered us from sin and death forever.

THE NEW COVENANT & REMEMBRANCE

Jesus was Jewish. He knew the Passover symbolized what God required of Him and He tried to explain it to His disciples several times before it happened. Then, on the night of Passover, the night that Jesus was betrayed and handed over to be crucified, He showed His disciples the way to remember and celebrate the New Covenant which would be established through His death and resurrection.

*Luke 22:15-20: And he said to them, "**I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer...** And **he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me."** In the same way, after the supper **he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.** (See also Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:17-25; John 13:21-30.)*

A covenant is a legally binding agreement between two or more parties where one or more of the parties become obligated to fulfill certain stated conditions. A covenant is an agreement of highest value, sealed with blood to symbolize that any party who does not meet the expressed terms and obligations of the covenant will pay with their own blood, usually meaning death.

In Jesus' day, all of Israel was expectantly waiting for their Messiah to arrive to institute a New Covenant which was better than the covenant of the Law. In this New Covenant, they would each know God for themselves and God would forgive all of their sins forever. Moreover, the Messiah would keep them constantly in God's good graces, so that God would always delight to bless them as His people and they would have total victory over their enemies.

*Jeremiah 31:31-34: "The days are coming," declares the LORD, "when I will make a **new covenant** with the people of Israel and with the people of Judah. It will not be like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to lead them out of Egypt, because they broke my covenant, though I was a husband to them," declares the LORD. "**This is the covenant** I will make with the people of Israel after that time," declares the LORD. "**I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people.** No longer will they teach their neighbor, or say to one another,*

'Know the LORD,' because **they will all know me**, from the least of them to the greatest," declares the LORD. "For **I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.**" (Quoted in Hebrews 10:16-18.)

Jeremiah 32:40-41: I will make **an everlasting covenant** with them; I will **never stop doing good to them**, and I will inspire them to fear me, so that they will never turn away from me. **I will rejoice in doing them good** and will assuredly plant them in this land **with all my heart and soul.**

Jeremiah 33:15-16: In those days and at that time I will make a **righteous Branch sprout from David's line**; he will do what is just and right in the land... This is the name by which it will be called: **The LORD Our Righteousness.**

Jesus fulfilled these promises and established the New Covenant. He is the Righteous One born in the line of David who gives us right standing with God because of His righteousness. Through His sacrifice in our place, our sins are forgiven and because of this, we are perpetually positioned for God's favor. Moreover, through the Holy Spirit, God's Laws are written upon our hearts and we can each know God for ourselves.

Now, when believers are assembled together, we take communion to remember that Christ's body was a sacrifice for us and His blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins. It is a cup of blessing, thanksgiving, and celebration of the New Covenant which Jesus Christ established for us! (See 1 Corinthians 10:16.)

THE BLOOD OF THE LAMB

In the original Passover, the Law of God had not yet been given to the Israelites and so, God did not hold them responsible for upholding the standard of the Law to be counted as righteous. They were delivered by faith. The only thing that was relevant in God's sight was whether or not they had painted the blood of the Passover lamb on their door.

For us as followers of Jesus, because Jesus fulfilled the Law and set us free from it, we are not required to meet the demands of the Law in order to have right standing with God. We are redeemed by faith. Jesus did not negate the Law of God for us through His blood but rather, He fulfilled it on our behalf so that we can receive the benefits of God's forgiveness and the blessings merited only by those who have a clean record before God. (See Romans 3:25-26.) Now, the only thing that is relevant in God's sight is whether or not we believe in the sufficiency of the shed blood of Jesus, our Passover Lamb.

This said, God knows His standard for atonement and it is expressed through His Law. Under the Law, at the Temple of God, when people brought their prescribed blood sacrifices of bulls, sheep, goats, or birds, they brought the greatest sacrifice they could afford to bring. (See Leviticus 5:7, 14:21.) When an offering was brought to God, all the sins of the person bringing the offering were transferred onto their sacrificial animal. Then, the animal was presented to God to shed its blood and give its life in the place of the person who had sinned so that the person could continue to live and be blessed as if they had never sinned.

*Hebrews 9:22: In fact, the law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and **without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness.***

*Leviticus 17:11: For **the life of a creature is in the blood**, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; **it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life.***

Accordingly, in order for God's terms of payment for the forgiveness of every sin of every person since Adam to be satisfied, a sacrifice of infinite worth was required. God owns all of creation and could afford to give a priceless gift. He gave the best offering He could ever give by giving His one and only Son.

*John 3:16: For **God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son**, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.*

One drop of the blood of Jesus is more valuable in God's sight than millions of bulls, sheep, goats, and birds. Because of this, we can be fully assured that Jesus' sacrifice is completely sufficient to pay for all of our sins and errors and redeem us from sin and death forever.

ONE NEW MAN – A CHOSEN GENERATION

In the original Passover, Israel walked out of Egypt and was birthed as a nation out of another nation. (See Deuteronomy 4:34-35.) Since Israel's birth as a nation, there have been two kinds of nations on the earth in God's sight: Israel and all the other nations or, you could say, Jews and non-Jews. Anyone from any other nation who wanted to enter into relationship with the Most High God was required to be circumcised and convert to Judaism. God made no other way to be in relationship with Him. (Consider Ephesians 2:11-12.)

At the resurrection, Jesus walked out of the tomb and a whole new creation of humanity was birthed out of every nation, tribe, and tongue.

*Ephesians 2:15b-19: **His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity** out of the two, [Jews & Gentiles] thus making peace, and **in one body** to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility... For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. Consequently, **you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household.***

Through the resurrection of Jesus, God created a new generation of humanity, a new species, out of an existing generation of humanity. The first generation includes all the natural descendants of Adam. The second generation includes everyone who believes that Jesus is Lord. We are a chosen generation and a new kind of people.

*1 Peter 2:9 NKJV: But you [are] a **chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people**, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light;*

Through faith, we are transformed from the old type of humanity to the new type of humanity and we have the right to become sons and daughters of God. He pours the Holy Spirit out into our hearts so that by the Holy Spirit we cry out to Him as our Father.

*Rom 8:15: The **Spirit you received does not make you slaves**, so that you live in fear again; rather, the **Spirit you received brought about your adoption to sonship. And by him we cry, "Abba, Father."** (See also Galatians 4:6.)*

This means that there are now only two kinds of people on the earth. First Adams and Second Adams. Anyone from the first generation of man who wants to be included in God's eternal covenant has to confess with their mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in their heart that God raised Him from the dead. God has made no other way to be saved.

The truth is that it is God's desire for everyone to be saved through Christ. But until that day, we as fellow believers are a unique and peculiar people who share a bond that is eternally more significant than any other human bond, loyalty, ethnicity, or nationality. We are a new people.

INCLUSION IN THE NEW PEOPLE – BAPTISM

In the first Passover, the visible outward sign of inclusion in God's covenant promises to Abraham was circumcision. (See Genesis 17:10.) No Israelite or foreigner was allowed to participate in the Passover unless they were circumcised into the covenant. Then, when the Israelites literally walked through the Red Sea, they were figuratively baptized and emerged as the nation of Israel. (See 1 Corinthians 10:1-2.)

But now, when we place our faith in Jesus, God gives us a *spiritual circumcision*. Our Adamic nature is rolled away as the Holy Spirit comes into our hearts. (See Romans 2:29; Ezekiel 36:26; Ephesians 1:13; 1 John 4:13-15.) Then, when we are baptized in water, we outwardly display the change in our hearts. As we are literally submerged into the waters of baptism, we figuratively include ourselves in the death of Jesus, and put to death the sinful nature we inherited from Adam. Coming up out of the waters of baptism signifies our participation in Jesus' resurrection. Our old life is rolled away and we emerge as a new creation.

*Colossians 2:11-12: **In him you were also circumcised with a circumcision not performed by human hands. Your whole self ruled by the flesh was put off when you were circumcised by Christ, having been buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through your faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead.***

*Romans 6:3-4: Or don't you know that all of us who were **baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death?** We were therefore **buried with him through baptism into death** in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead through the glory of the Father, **we too may live a new life.***

Full submersion is the way that Christ's first followers understood the requirements and procedure for baptism. In fact, it is rooted in a practice ordained in God's Law for ritual cleansing, called a *mikveh* in Hebrew. Ritual cleansing like this was required of priests before they could serve God and was required of common people in order to remain clean before God.

When John the Baptist began his ministry in the Jordan River area, he was known as John the Immerser. John baptized people by submerging them in water as a demonstration that they had repented of their sins. (See Luke 3:3; Acts 13:24-25, 19:3-4.) Through John's baptism, repentant people were ceremonially cleansed as they awaited the arrival of the Messiah. But as soon as Jesus arrived, John immediately took second place to Jesus and pointed people exclusively to Him. (See John 3:26-30.)

Later, when Jesus commanded His disciples to baptize people from all nations, He was not referring to John's baptism. Through baptism in Jesus' name, we descend into a watery grave and rise again as a new creation. This is something that John's baptism did not include. In Jesus' baptism, we are repentant, cleansed of sin, and transformed into a new creation as the Holy Spirit makes His home in us. In fact, when John the Baptist prophesied of Jesus, he knew that Jesus' baptism would be more substantial and significant than his ritual washings. Jesus confirmed this before He ascended to heaven.

*Luke 3:16-17: John answered them all, "**I baptize you with water. But one who is more powerful than I will come, the straps of whose sandals I am not worthy to untie. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire.** His winnowing fork is in his hand to clear his threshing floor and to gather the wheat into his barn, but he will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire."*

*Luke 24:49: I am going to send you what my Father has promised; but stay in the city until you have been **clothed with power from on high.***

*Acts 1:5: For **John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.***

For Christ's first followers in Jerusalem, the Holy Spirit had not yet been poured out. They eagerly awaited this "baptism" from heaven. For us today, since the Holy Spirit has already been poured out from heaven, we receive the Holy Spirit when we believe Jesus. There is only one baptism in Christ and it endues us with power from on high, as Jesus promised. (See Ephesians 4:5.) This said, the Holy Spirit functions in different ways to give us what we need to fulfill God's purposes. We will cover this more in a later chapter.

All of this is to say that we are included in God's New Covenant by grace through faith. Baptism reveals the change which has taken place in our hearts and our new commitment to God. The Holy Spirit marks us for ultimate redemption and gives us power for life until Jesus returns.

HEAVENLY KINGDOM

Before Jesus ascended to heaven, His disciples expected Him to fulfill the Scriptures about the Messiah of Israel who will come with vengeance to destroy all of Israel's enemies and rule over all nations for eternity. They thought Jesus was going to establish His Kingdom in the ordinary way of earthly wars and kingdoms.

*Acts 1:6-8: Then they gathered around him and asked him, "**Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?**" He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."*

They were most likely expecting Jesus to lead them in political or military overthrow of their Roman oppressors to take dominion in the earth. This was a reasonable expectation on their part because of Scriptures pertaining to the rule of God's Messiah such as this one:

*Daniel 7:21-22, 27: As I watched, this horn was waging war against the holy people and defeating them, **until the Ancient of Days came and pronounced judgment in favor of the holy people of the Most High, and the time came when they possessed the kingdom. ... Then the sovereignty, power and greatness of all the kingdoms under heaven will be handed over to the holy people of the Most High. His kingdom will be an everlasting kingdom, and all rulers will worship and obey him.***

Assuredly, the day Christ's followers anticipated will come. However, until that day, Jesus' Kingdom is not of this world. Jesus establishes the Kingdom of God in the hearts of those who believe Him until He returns to reign on earth for eternity. Therefore, His purpose for us today is not political rebellion against the powers or governments of this world or taking dominion in the earth. God's priority is the salvation of souls. Therefore, we no longer regard it from an earthly point of view but from a heavenly one.

*Luke 17:20-21: Once, on being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, Jesus replied, "**The coming of the kingdom of God is not something that can be observed, nor will people say, 'Here it is,' or 'There it is,' because the kingdom of God is in your midst [within you.]**"*

*John 18:36-3: Jesus said, "**My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.**" "You are a king, then!" said Pilate. Jesus answered, "**You say that I am a king. In fact, the reason I was born and came into the world is to testify to the truth. Everyone on the side of truth listens to me.**"*

*Revelation 1:5b-6: To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, and has **made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father--to him be glory and power for ever and ever! Amen.***

Again, I say: Thousands of years ago, the one and only God who created heaven and earth redeemed a Kingdom for Himself. His design was for us to be holy, meaning special to Him, and unique among all the nations as His people. Through His Kingdom, God's goodness and power could be revealed to the rest of the world.

Jesus is our King. Our Kingdom is not of this world – it is holy. To be holy means to be set apart. Holy things are sacred, precious, and should be handled with special care unlike the way that common things are

managed. In fact, one of the primary duties of the Old Covenant priests of God was to teach the people to distinguish between the holy and the common. (See Leviticus 10:10.) The way we make our decisions and live our lives reveals if we love the world and its ways or if we love God and His ways. (See 1 John 2:15-17.) Our King's life does not conform to the pattern of this world and as we follow Him, our lives will reflect a holiness that is so peculiar that it becomes a sign and a wonder which brings God great glory.

*Revelation 12:10-11: Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the **salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God**, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. **They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb** and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*

COMMUNION

Luke 22:15-20 NIV - And he said to them, "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer... And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, 'This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me.'" In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you."

DESCRIPTION

On the night of the first Passover, God's people painted the blood of the lamb on the doorposts of their homes as an act of faith by which God would protect them from the destroyer. Even today when Passover is celebrated, it is done in remembrance of this great deliverance by the hand of God.

Jesus Christ is our eternal Passover Lamb. His blood was shed for the forgiveness of our sins so that we can be protected from the destruction of sin and the evil one. His body was broken so that we can freely enter into the presence of God to worship. When we take communion, we remember this great deliverance.

The first disciples of Christ took communion (or "broke bread") regularly. Consecrated bread and wine were made readily available for believers to serve themselves or take communion together. As a holy nation and a royal priesthood, (1 Peter 2:9) every believer is a priest of God and able to administer the body and blood of Christ with due reverence. This said, communion and the benefits of Christ's sacrifice are only available to those who believe that Jesus is Lord and that God raised Him from the dead. This means that if you do not yet believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you should abstain from communion or better yet, believe Jesus and partake.

Practicing the partaking of Communion is about commemorating Christ's sacrifice, renewing our faith in what He has done for us, and to looking forward to His return.



PURPOSE:

To honor and remember the sacrifice of Jesus.

To examine our faith in what Jesus did for us.

To rejoice in the forgiveness of our sins and our New Covenant access to God.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:

Remembrance of Jesus.

Indwelling life of God.

Renewed faith.

Fresh start of forgiveness.

PRACTICE

- Prepare the bread and wine.
 - Acquire bread and wine or juice to be consecrated to God for the purpose of Communion.
 - Consecrate the bread and wine to the Lord by praying over them something like, "I consecrate this bread and wine to the Lord."
 - Do not use this bread or wine for casual snacking.
- Perceive the body and blood of Jesus.
 - Jesus said of the bread and wine, "this **is** my body" and, "this **is** my blood" even when He still had a natural body.
 - Read the Additional Scriptures about what the body and blood of Jesus have done for us.
 - Believe that these Scriptures apply to the body and blood you are about to partake of.
- Examine yourself and your faith.
 - Do you believe that Jesus Christ shed His blood for the forgiveness of your sins?
 - Do you believe that you are totally forgiven?
 - Do you believe that you can receive all of the benefits of Christ body and blood through faith in Jesus?
 - Do you regard the communion bread and wine/juice as holy and consecrated to God?
- Remember the Lord's death and proclaim His return.
 - Praise God that because of Jesus's sacrifice, you are protected from the destroyer until Jesus returns.
- Partake.
 - As you eat the body and drink the blood of Jesus, be consciously strengthened with the life and power of God in your inmost being. The indestructible life of Christ and the same power that raised Christ from the dead is in you.
- Praise God and rejoice in His salvation!

NOTES:



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

1 Corinthians 11:23-32

John 6:53-57

Luke 22:15-20

John 1:29

Hebrews 10:10

Colossians 1:22

Ephesians 1:7

Romans 5:9

1 John 1:7

Revelation 12:11

1 Corinthians 5:7

1 Peter 1:18-19

Passover Story:
Exodus 12-15

COMMUNION

Scripture List*

Jesus said to them, "Very truly I tell you, unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink his blood, you have no life in you. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood has eternal life, and I will raise them up at the last day. For my flesh is real food and my blood is real drink. Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them. Just as the living Father sent me and I live because of the Father, so the one who feeds on me will live because of me. – John 6:53-57

THE BODY OF CHRIST

We have been made holy through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all. Hebrews 10:10

But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death to present you holy in his sight, without blemish and free from accusation. – Colossians 1:2

"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." – 1Peter 2:24

THE BLOOD OF JESUS

In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace. – Ephesians 1:7

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! – Romans 5:9

Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus. – Hebrews 10:19

And so Jesus also suffered outside the city gate to make the people holy through his own blood. – Hebrews 13:12

How much more, then, will the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God, cleanse our consciences from acts that lead to death, so that we may serve the living God! – Hebrews 9:14

But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. – 1John 1:7

And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation. – Revelation 5:9

They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. – Revelation 12:11

A CALLED OUT PEOPLE

When God called the people of Israel out of Egypt, He set them apart from all other nations. Now, through our eternal Passover in Christ, God calls us out of every nation, tribe, and tongue to be His special people.

*Revelation 5:9-10: And they sang a new song, saying: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and **with your blood you purchased for God persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.** You have made them to be **a kingdom and priests to serve our God,** and they will reign on the earth."*

*Ephesians 3:10-11: **His intent was that now, through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms,** according to his eternal purpose that he accomplished in Christ Jesus our Lord.*

The word translated as "church" in the New Testament is the Greek word *ekklesia* which literally means "a called out people." God has called us out of this world to be His. We are a nation of people who have pledged our eternal allegiance to the same King – Jesus.

In the days of Jesus, Greek was the predominant language in the world. The word *ekklesia* was commonly used to describe the assembly of citizens in any given Greek city. In those days, citizenship was a special class of people with rights above those of non-citizens and slaves who were the property of their masters. *Ekklesia* was the word for the governmental assembly of the city, including officers who had authority over judicial matters for city politics and civil issues or disputes. For example, in Acts 19, the word *ekklesia* is used to describe the assembly in Ephesus of city leaders and citizens who wanted to put the Apostle Paul on trial for proclaiming Jesus and interfering with their idol making businesses.

For the first followers of Jesus, the concept of being a called out people of God with their own rights of governance was nothing new. Throughout the Old Testament, the word *qahal* is used to describe the whole assembly of the people of Israel who worshipped the same God, were governed by the same laws, and served the same king. (In today's Hebrew, congregations are referred to as *kehilla*, from this same word.) God's intent was that through the people of Israel following His laws, His righteousness and power would be displayed through their wisdom and justice. (See Deuteronomy 4:5-8.) Even when their land and lives were ruled or dominated by other nations, they sought diligently to maintain their right to govern themselves according to God's laws of worship and justice.

Now, when Jesus calls us to discipleship, He is calling us out of the world to belong to Him, to learn and live by His ways, and to follow Him with total loyalty to Him and His Kingdom. We have become the *ekklesia* of God, the New Covenant *qahal* of God, and citizens of heaven. (See Philippians 3:20.) We bow to no other king but Jesus. We are an autonomously governed body of people who have been delegated authority by our King to rule over judicial matters and disputes for those within His Body. We obey the rules of whatever land we live in as long as they do not conflict with our obedience to our King Jesus. We do not try to help the people of this world live better lives or be better people. We call them out of the kingdom of this world to be a part of the Kingdom of God. (Consider Acts 4:24-30.) Our goal is not to "start

a church," "attend church" every weekend, or raise money for "church buildings." Jesus builds His church upon the fact that He is King.

Matthew 16:16-19: Simon Peter answered, "You are the Messiah [King], the Son of the living God." Jesus replied, "Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church [ekklesia], and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven."

The Church is built by Jesus. The Church is built upon the rock solid truth that Jesus is King – the Messiah who God promised for the redemption of mankind and who rules the earth for all eternity. Jesus died on a cross, descended into Hades [Hell] and was raised again to eternal life and freedom. The gates of Hell **did not** prevail against Him and they will not prevail against God's ekklesia. Hallelujah!

In His resurrection, Jesus attained the keys to the Kingdom of heaven. The gates of heaven had been locked shut due to man's sinfulness and the key to the lock was perfect righteousness. Jesus unlocked heaven for us through His righteousness according to God's Law so that we gain access to God through faith in Him. Hallelujah! Yet, Jesus did not keep the keys to Himself. In the passage above, He explicitly told His disciples ahead of time that He would give the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven to them, including authority to bind and to loose.

BINDING AND LOOSING

Binding and loosing was not a new concept for the first followers of Jesus and their understanding of being the ekklesia or called out people of God. Through the Old Covenant, it was the priests, scribes, religious leaders, and experts in God's Law who held the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven because they had the God-given right to determine what was allowed and what was forbidden.

Binding and loosing are legal terms for the establishment of that which is forbidden and that which is permitted. To *bind* is to impose a requirement and render it binding, meaning the people are bound to adhere to the requirement of face consequences. To *loose* is to allow/permit behaviors and render the people loosed from legal consequence and relieved from obligation.

God's intent and aim was always access to Him through righteousness so that His people could know Him and be His Kingdom. Unfortunately, the religious authorities enforced so many of their own binding regulations that they made it impossible for anyone to enter the Kingdom of God, including themselves. (See Matthew 23:13.) But now, we the Church have been given the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven through Christ-given authority to bind and to loose.

An example of this was demonstrated when the early apostles, elders, and disciples gathered together at the Jerusalem Council. The hot topic of theological debate in that day was whether or not a Gentile follower of Jesus should be required to be circumcised as evidence of their inclusion in God's people. To require circumcision would be to bind people in obligation to be circumcised, to not require circumcision would loose people from the obligation.

Significantly, the issues addressed at the Jerusalem Council all pertain to inclusion or expulsion from God's people. Circumcision was the sign of inclusion in God's Covenant since the days of Abraham and is included in the Law of Moses. However, under the New Covenant, to require obedience to one Law is equal to necessitating compliance with the entirety of the Law. (See James 2:10.) Any requirement other than faith in Jesus Christ is not the New Covenant which was sealed with the blood of Christ. We have been loosed from the legal obligation to obey the Law of Moses and all things are permitted for us. (See 1 Corinthians 6:12, 10:23.) Righteousness and access to God is attained by grace through faith in Jesus Christ as a free gift not because of what we do or do not do. (See Ephesians 2:8.)

This said, the Law of God is good and explicitly details God's standard of purity in the event that there is any confusion about what is pleasing to Him. (See 1 Timothy 1:9-11; Romans 7:12.) Therefore, at the Jerusalem Council the apostles and elders agreed that in order to reveal God's holiness to those who do not yet believe that Jesus is Lord, it was important to bind believers under obligation to abstain from eating food offered to idols, from eating blood, and from sexual immorality. (For God's definition of sexual immorality, see Leviticus, Chapter 18.) Because these things were strictly forbidden in the Law of Moses and punishable by death, any Jew would find it difficult to accept the Gospel message of Jesus from someone doing these things while claiming to follow the Jewish Messiah and worship the God of Israel.

This means that living by the New Covenant standard of faith does not contradict the Old Covenant standard but rather gives us supernatural power to uphold the Law which is written upon our hearts by doing what is pleasing to God. (See Romans 3:31.) This is a demonstration that followers of Jesus are truly called out from this world and its ways. Proclaiming the Gospel with our mouths is easy, but it is how we conduct our lives as God's holy people that tells the watching world about the God we serve.

At the Jerusalem Council, the apostles and elders established these regulations, not to require obedience to the Old Covenant in any way but, to keep believers in the New Covenant aligned with God's will for their lives so that everyone who believes can receive all that has been promised through faith in Christ, both in this age and in the age to come. Unlike the religious leaders of the old system, the apostles and elders did not make it difficult for believers to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Praise God!

As a quick side note, at one point in his travels Paul had Timothy circumcised, which would seem to be a contradiction of the decision of the Jerusalem Council. Timothy's mother was Jewish which qualified him as an Israelite (Jewishness passes through the mother because paternity was impossible to prove in those days) but his father was Gentile, which was why he had not been circumcised previously. In order to not cause a big fuss among the unbelieving Jews and new converts to Christianity in the cities on their itinerary, Paul exercised willing deference so that Jesus Christ could be the primary focus of conversation, not circumcision. However, Paul utterly refused to force Titus, who had been born 100% Gentile, to be circumcised in order to be accepted into the faith. (See Acts 16:1-3; Galatians 2:3; Book of Titus.)

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Jesus also taught His disciples about the binding and loosing authority of the ekklesia in the context of conflict resolution. This included expulsion or admittance to the Church (forbidding or allowing) and addressing sin within the called out people of God.

*Matthew 18:15-18: **If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses. If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church [ekklesia]; and if they refuse to listen even to the church [ekklesia], treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector. Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.***

According to this teaching, sin in the community and conflicts between believers should respectfully escalate step-by-step. First, the offended parties meet privately to address the situation. Next, one or two other believers are included as witnesses. If the person still will not listen, the matter is brought to the authority of the church/ekklesia for a verdict. Finally, if the offender will not heed the decision of church leadership, they are to be expelled from the ekklesia and treated like an unbeliever and traitor.

The church at Corinth experienced this when a believer was caught continually having sexual relations with his father's wife. He was expelled from the church and turned over to Satan for the destruction of his flesh. (See 1 Corinthians 5:1-5, 9-13.) But let us consider how we treat unbelievers and enemies of God. We

proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ and salvation by grace through faith for all sinners who repent. Therefore, when the man in Corinth was truly repentant for his sin, the Corinthian church reinstated, welcomed, and comforted him so that he would not be overly discouraged or eternally damned. (See 2 Corinthians 2:5-11.)

It is not a coincidence that in this same passage where Jesus taught about binding and loosing, or admittance and expulsion due to sin, He explained that offenses between believers are minor by comparison to the way that all of us have sinned against God. (See Matthew 18:21-35.) If the financial figures in the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant were converted to modern day equivalents, God paid our debt of 10,000 talents (multi-billion dollar debt.) Conflicts between believers amount to 100 denarii (several thousand dollars.) Releasing someone who hurts or offends us from such a small amount is a disproportionately low expectation if we truly understand what Jesus has done for us. Jesus could have come to avenge all of our wrongs against God but instead He came to give His life so that we could be forgiven and live free. In fact, this is the ministry we have been called to as God's called out ones – the ministry of reconciliation. God's desire is to reconcile people to Himself by not holding their sins against them through their faith in the blood of Jesus. (See 2 Corinthians 5:18-21.) As God's called out people and as governed by the Holy Spirit, God has given us the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven including authority in the earth to forgive sins.

*John 20:22-23: And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. **If you forgive anyone's sins, their sins are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven.**"*

When Jesus was on the cross being crucified, He pleaded, "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do." (See Luke 23:34.) Similarly, Stephen said almost the same thing when unbelievers were stoning him for telling them Jesus is the Messiah. (See Acts 7:60.) The Apostle Paul also extended mercy to everyone who abandoned him when he met with trials and intense persecution. (See 2 Timothy 4:16.)

Moreover, Paul rebuked believers sharply for not being able to peaceably resolve disputes between themselves and even more so for taking their disputes to the court system of this world. He emphasized that it is more important for us to learn to forgive one another, allow ourselves to be wronged, and live out the teachings of Jesus to turn the other cheek, go the extra mile, and give our cloak to the one who steals our tunic. (See 1 Corinthians 6:1-11; Matthew 5:39-41.)

However, when it came to false teachers who opposed the work of God with destructive heresies which caused confusion and dissention in the Church, Paul had no mercy. He named them by name and by the authority given to him by God for the ekklesia, expelled them from the people of God, turning them over to Satan so that they could learn not to blaspheme. (See 1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 2:17-19, 4:14-15.)

APPOINTING LEADERS IN THE EKKLESIA

Jesus builds His Church on the truth that He is King. Jesus also appoints the leaders of His Church in order for them to carry out His commands in the earth and execute justice among His people.

The first 120 followers of Jesus knew the significance of God's sovereign selection for positions of leadership. Even without the Holy Spirit which had not been poured out yet, they knew that the decision was not theirs to make and so they cast lots to hear from God. (See Acts 1:12-26.) Significantly, they would have known from the Hebrews Scriptures how the prophet Samuel had been instructed by God to appoint only the leaders whom God selected due to the fact that God looks at the heart of a person and not the outward appearances or apparent qualifications. (See 1 Samuel 9:15-17, 16:3,7,12.)

A little while later in the Church's earliest history as the Church grew in Jerusalem, arguments broke out between believers and disharmony set in due to inequitable distribution of food. The apostles knew that it would not be right for them to allow this issue to divert their focus from the Word of God and prayer and

so they appointed Deacons. (See Acts 6:3-7.) The word for *deacon* is the same word used for a *waiter* and, practically speaking, they served the needs of God's people. Deacons were nominated by the people based on their exemplary lives of service to God. As the Gospel spread, the position of Deacon became a common function in Church life and the Apostle Paul gave various guidelines for ensuring the genuineness of any nominee's faith, lifestyle, and service. (See 1 Timothy 3:8-13; Titus 1:5-9.)

As churches were formed and became established in various cities, the apostles selected and appointed *elders* in each church. (See Acts 14:21-23.) After selecting the elders to be appointed, the apostles prayed and laid hands on the elders in order to share their governing authority over God's people with them for their city. Elders assisted the apostles by presiding over the Church in their local area, with particular care for financial and theological matters and protecting the local flock from false teachers. (See Acts 20:17-28.) The Apostle Paul also gave guidelines for the character qualities required for those serving in the function of elder. (See 1 Timothy 3:1-7, 5:17-25; Titus 1:5-9.)

All of this was in accordance with the model of the Old Testament since the days of Moses. At the advice of his father-in-law, Moses selected men of integrity who feared the Lord and hated a bribe to share the burden of governing the people and judging the local and/or smaller cases in matters of justice. Later, seventy of these men were appointed by God as the elders of Israel when God shared with the elders the same spirit that was on Moses so that they could govern and judge according to God's ways. (See Exodus 18:13-26; Numbers 11:10-29.)

In addition to deacons and elders, the Holy Spirit also revealed to listening believers the foreordained plans of God for individuals within their midst. As this happened, these people were set apart so that God could fulfill His purposes through them for His Church and His Kingdom.

*Acts 13:2-3: While they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, **the Holy Spirit said, "Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them."** So after they had fasted and prayed, **they placed their hands on them and sent them off.***

It is noteworthy that the God's people did not determine God's call upon anyone's life but, rather, recognized and confirmed God's pre-existing purpose. Examples of this pattern include David, who was anointed to be the King of Israel many years before he was appointed King, (See 1 Samuel 16:13; 2 Samuel 2:11, 5:1-4;) Jeremiah, who was called by God as a prophet before forming Jeremiah was formed in his mother's womb, (Jeremiah 1:5;) and Paul, who was chosen as an apostle of God before the foundation of the earth, anointed as an apostle when he first came to faith in Jesus Christ, and appointed as an apostle when the Church at Antioch sent him on his first missionary journey. (See Galatians 1:15; Acts 9:15.) Once God's purpose was revealed by the Holy Spirit, believers fasted and prayed, laid hands on God's chosen ones and sent them on their way.

LAYING ON OF HANDS

The laying on of hands is another practice which is prevalent throughout the Scriptures as a method of transferring blessing, imparting spiritual gifts, and appointing the leaders of God's people. In the Old Testament, Jacob laid hands on the heads of Joseph's sons Ephraim and Manasseh to adopt them as his own children and to bless them, and then he prophesied about their lives and their descendants. (See Genesis 48:1-22.) Later, Moses laid his hands on Joshua to impart, or transfer, his anointing of wisdom for leading the people of Israel so that Joshua became his successor. (See Numbers 27:12-23; Deuteronomy 34:9.) When the tribe of Levi was selected by God for the work of ministering to Him and to the Tabernacle, all of Israel gathered together and laid hands on the Levites in order to demonstrate that the Levites served God on their behalf. (See Numbers 8:5-15.) When the High Priest blessed the people of Israel, he raised his hands with his palms towards the people to symbolize that he was laying his hands on all of them in order to bless them. (See Leviticus 9:22; Numbers 6:22-27.)

Now, in the New Covenant, the laying on of hands continues and is used to consecrate believers with Christ's perfect righteousness, to fill one another with the Holy Spirit, to impart spiritual gifts, to heal the sick, and to set believers apart for God's special tasks.

*Acts 9:12, 17: In a vision he has seen a man named Ananias come and **place his hands on him to restore his sight.**" ... Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. **Placing his hands on Saul,** he said, "Brother Saul, the Lord--Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here--has sent me **so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.**"*

*Acts 19:6: **When Paul placed his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied.** (See also Acts 8:17.)*

*1 Timothy 4:14: Do not neglect your gift, which was **given you through prophecy when the body of elders laid their hands on you.** (See also 2 Timothy 1:6.)*

*Mark 16:17-18: And these signs will accompany those who believe: In my name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands; and when they drink deadly poison, it will not hurt them at all; **they will place their hands on sick people, and they will get well.***

*Acts 28:8: His father was sick in bed, suffering from fever and dysentery. Paul went in to see him and, after prayer, **placed his hands on him and healed him.***

Through the laying on of hands as prompted by the Holy Spirit, God's chosen ones were appointed to their God-given missions, callings, and tasks. Some people worked within the Church, some were sent out by the Church, and as everyone did their part, God's purpose was fulfilled in the earth. This said, the Apostle Paul warned not to be hasty in laying hands on people to appoint them to positions of authority within the Church. If their lives are full of sin and they are given authority to govern others through the laying on of hands, then those who laid hands share some level of responsibility for the damage their sin causes within the Body. (See 1 Timothy 5:22.)

Being appointed by to a position of leadership within the Church is a serious responsibility of eternal weight. We cannot take it lightly or treat it like a position of leadership in this world. For example, before the crucifixion, Jesus' disciples were constantly competing to hold the top place of power and authority in His ministry. But after Jesus' resurrection, none of them ever competed for greatness again, and each one of them went on to serve God with all they had and eventually give their lives in the cause of spreading the word that Jesus is King.

*Matthew 20:25-28: Jesus called them together and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. **Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be your slave--** just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (See also Matthew 23:8-11; Mark 10:35-45; Luke 9:46-48; James 3:16-17.)*

The Christian life is not a democracy, it is a monarchy. Jesus is King. May we be eager to serve our King and serve others as He leads us. If we are in leadership, may we walk in reverence and submission to God in all of our thoughts, words, and actions. May the Church come into fullness as the called out people of God in righteousness, mercy, and speaking the truth in love so that the world will see that Jesus is King.

CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Scripture Reading & Worksheet

Read each of the following passages and then use the chart below for study and reflection.

- Matthew 18:15-19
- Luke 12:13-15
- Matthew 5:21-26
- 1 John 3:12-18
- James 4:1-12

List the three stages Jesus prescribed for conflict resolution when others have hurt you.		
What did Jesus command for times when you are the one at fault?		
How do these passages challenge you to be more pro-active in your approach to conflict resolution?		
What did James say is the source of most inter-personal conflicts?	How did Jesus respond to the conflict between brothers?	
How do these passages challenge you to greater selflessness as the solution to your conflicts?		
List three questions you still have about resolving conflicts in a godly manner.		
What is your conclusion or main take-away from these passages?		

FELLOWSHIP OF ONE FAMILY*

The first 120 disciples of Christ in Jerusalem were filled with the same and singular passion – Jesus. They were so consumed with the love of their Savior and couldn't help but to love one another and share everything with one another. Nothing was important to them anymore except Jesus and knowing Him. Possessions that were once the pride of life were now offered for the common good of anyone among them who had need. No one considered themselves better than anyone else because Jesus had died for them all. They assembled to worship Jesus and they ate common meals together, enjoying one another's company, praying together, praising God, and sharing communion.

Even before the Holy Spirit was poured out, they were completely and totally devoted to obeying Christ's commands. Men and women alike were now all of one mind and considered equal as followers Jesus.

*Acts 1:14 KJV: These all continued **with one accord in prayer and supplication**, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.*

The word for *one accord* in Greek is a combination of two words which mean to *rush along* and *in unison*. It is used to describe groups of people who agree unanimously about what is true and what needs to be done. It is reminiscent of a great harmony, like a symphony of many different instruments coming together to play a composed melody at the direction of a common conductor.

After Pentecost, because the Holy Spirit had been poured out, this natural devotion was raised to a supernatural dimension as 3,120 people were of *one accord*, sharing the same heart and mind. As the Holy Spirit circumcised their hearts in selflessness, they were compelled to share everything that they owned so that everyone had what they needed.

*Acts 2:42-47: They **devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer**. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. **All the believers were together and had everything in common**. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. **Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.***

*Acts 4:32-35: **All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had**. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And **God's grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.***

This type of community was a living demonstration of what God had always intended for society. When God created Adam & Eve and told them to fill the earth with their family, this is what He had in mind.

GOD'S DESIGN FOR COMMUNITY

When God gave His Law to the people of Israel, He articulated His will for His people towards one another. God's Laws clearly outlined His views for restitution for stolen property, moved landmarks, fair treatment of slaves, dealing with a neighbor's stray animal, not pretending that you did not witness a crime, testifying truthfully, deceitful seduction, betrayal, family inheritance, and a whole host of other issues that the people daily faced in their dealings with one another. God's Laws for social responsibility, equity, fairness, and the administration of justice placed higher value on human life, dignity, and care for creation than any other society in history ever had. Because God is the One who created every person and everything, His statutes and precepts reveal His love for all He created and His desire for harmony and peace.

Moreover, the purpose of implementing God's Laws was to demonstrate His goodness towards His people and then, as His people lived in accordance with His Laws, their kindness towards one another would reveal God's love through them to the whole world.

*Deuteronomy 4:6-8: Observe them carefully, for **this will show your wisdom and understanding to the nations**, who will hear about all these decrees and say, "**Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.**" What other nation is so great as to have their gods near them the way the LORD our God is near us whenever we pray to him? **And what other nation is so great as to have such righteous decrees and laws as this body of laws I am setting before you today?***

*Psalm 67:1-2: May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine on us-- **so that your ways may be known on earth, your salvation among all nations.***

Notably, God's statutes for His people towards one another are slightly different from the rules for His people towards non-Israelites. Through God's Law, Israelites were instructed to lend freely to their fellow Jews with an open hand, without charging interest, without a tight fist, and without a grudge in their hearts. (See Exodus 22:25; Leviticus 25:36.) God also made provision for the poor, the orphan, and the widow who could not provide for themselves, and demanded fair treatment of the foreigner residing among the Israelites. In fact, foreigners in Israel were never to be abused, mistreated, or oppressed but welcomed and included whenever possible.

*Deuteronomy 23:19-20: **Do not charge a fellow Israelite interest**, whether on money or food or anything else that may earn interest. **You may charge a foreigner interest, but not a fellow Israelite**, so that the LORD your God may bless you in everything you put your hand to in the land you are entering to possess.*

*Deuteronomy 15:4, 7-8, 10-11: However, **there need be no poor people among you**, for in the land the LORD your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you,... **If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites** in any of the towns of the land the LORD your God is giving you, **do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need... Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart**; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to **be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.***

*Leviticus 23:22: When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very **edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. Leave them for the poor and for the foreigner residing among you.** I am the LORD your God. (See also Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:9-10; Deuteronomy 24:18-20, 14:29.)*

All of this is to say that after the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost, Christians began to organically and genuinely align their lives with God's original design for community. They considered themselves to be brothers and sisters in the family of God and they depended on one another for the things they needed. This was particularly true because many of them gave up everything in order to follow Christ or had been disowned by their families for worshipping Jesus. Therefore, they shared everything that they had with each other so that every believer had what they needed. They placed high priority on taking care of fellow believers so that there would be no lack among them.

*1 John 3:16-18: This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. **And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers and sisters. [fellow believers] If anyone has material possessions and sees a brother or sister in need but has no pity on them, how can the love of God be in that person?** Dear children, let us not love with words or speech but with actions and in truth.*

*James 2:14-16: What good is it, my brothers and sisters, if someone claims to have faith but has no deeds? Can such faith save them? **Suppose a brother or a sister [fellow believer] is without clothes and daily food. If one of you says to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and well fed," but does nothing about their physical needs, what good is it?***

*1 John 4:19-21: **We love because he first loved us. Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister [fellow believer] is a liar.** For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. **And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister. [fellow believer]***

*Galatians 6:10: Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, **especially to those who belong to the family of believers.***

The word most often used in the New Testament to address the people of the Church, is *brethren* which is also translated *brothers and sisters*. This word indicates people who came out of the same womb and signifies people of the same bloodline, ancestor, or people group. We as believers come out of the same womb (the tomb of Christ) into the family of God through the blood of Jesus. This connects us to one another in a profoundly significant and eternal bond. We are family.

In fact, Jesus acknowledged the bond of spiritual family as deeper and more significant than the bond of natural family. As His ministry progressed, His own family thought He had lost His mind and did not believe Him. (See Mark 3:21; John 7:5.) Although He made provision for the care of His mother before His death, Jesus publicly elevated the role of His disciples as His family over that of biological family.

*Mark 3:33-35: "**Who are my mother and my brothers?**" he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, "**Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God's will is my brother and sister and mother.**"*

The people God has selected to be His are our family for eternity. Like any good father, it is our Father's desire for us to get along with one another as His sons and daughters and to share with one another, help each other, and resolve conflicts with one another as brothers and sisters in the same family.

KOINONIA - FELLOWSHIP

Christian fellowship is an expression of our oneness and family bond. The word for fellowship in Greek is *koinonia* which means *association or community* describing joint participation or partnership. Each member is an essential piece of the whole. It can also mean *communion, intercourse, and intimacy* which clearly indicate that the magnitude of *koinonia* is not just casual getting together over pot-luck dinners and pleasant conversation. Rather, we are one body which is not whole if a single piece is missing.

Romans 12:4-5: 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.**

1Corinthians 12:4-6, 12, 27: There are different kinds of gifts, but **the same Spirit** distributes them. There are different kinds of service, but **the same Lord**. There are different kinds of working, but in all of them and in everyone it is **the same God** at work... **Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ...** Now **you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.**

Ephesians 4:4-6: **There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.**

In Christ we have become one. We all have the same heart – the Holy Spirit; the same King – Jesus; and the same Father – God. This oneness is so important that Jesus passionately prayed for us as believers function in unity with one another. This harmony among us is one of the ways by which those who do not know Christ as their Savior may be drawn in to know Him.

John 17:20-23: "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, **that all of them may be one**, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us **so that the world may believe that you have sent me**. I have given them the glory that you gave me, **that they may be one as we are one-- I in them and you in me--so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.**

God's intent for the Church is for all of His people to be unified as ONE body so that we are a living, breathing, walking, talking demonstration of God's nature of giving, serving, and loving. Through our self-sacrificing participation and partnership with one another, we reveal that we are different than the self-serving world and its competitive ways.

This is not just a dream. This happened in the earliest days of the Church as the Gospel message spread to new territories and Christian communities were formed. Even today, the oneness of Christians is more profound than any other bond in the world. We do not just share intellectual beliefs and a common book. We have a bond with one another that is deeper than flesh and blood, more powerful than family heritage, and which far surpasses any natural form of partnership or association. In Christ, we are one.

GATHERING TOGETHER

In the earliest days of the Church, worshippers of Jesus gathered together as a new faith, a new family, and a new people of God and God continually added to their numbers. The word for gathering together is *synago*. It is the same word used to describe gathering fish into a net, collecting sheaves of harvest, or assembling for an important meeting. Christian gatherings are designed to be a preview of the ultimate eternal harvest celebration where the children of God rejoice in His goodness.

Believers opened their hearts and the homes to one another and for worshipping Jesus. This is because in those days, there were no church buildings. In fact, there were no church buildings for the first three hundred years of Christianity and because of heavy persecution, believers often had to meet in secret.

When they gathered together, they would pray, fast, seek the will of the Lord, function in their spiritual gifts, and share communion. In their flow of service, any and every believer was welcome to share what the Holy Spirit was revealing to them.

1Corinthians 12:7,11: Now **to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.** ... All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and **he distributes them to each one, just as he determines.**

1Corinthians 14:26,31: *What then shall we say, brothers and sisters? When you come together, **each of you has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation...** For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged.*

In the early years of Christianity, the Holy Spirit orchestrated the flow of Christian gatherings. Those with more knowledge of the Scriptures taught other believers and strengthened them in their knowledge of God. The Elders and Deacons in any given city were there to guard and guide the people in the ways of God and to serve the needs of the people as they arose in the course of life.

However, this changed drastically after Constantine became Emperor of Rome in 313 AD. Constantine professed to be a Christian because he believed that the God of the Christians gave him control of the Roman Empire. Overnight, Christianity went from being heavily persecuted (including throwing Christians to wild animals in the Colosseum for entertainment) to being the favored religion of the civilized world in that day. Home churches were forbidden and buildings which had been pagan temples became the meeting places for Christian meetings. Then, in keeping with the pagan temple customs, priests and leaders were appointed often through bribery or cronyism and were given titles like Father, Master, and Pope even though Jesus had specifically instructed His followers not to call anyone father or master except God alone, and not to let anyone call them father or master. The priests became the only ones with access to the holy books while the people had no Bibles of their own to read. The flow of service changed so that leaders gave dissertations and dictated to people what they needed to do while the people were expected to remain silent and submissive. Moreover, Constantine's zeal for political power mixed with his questionable profession of Christian faith diverted the focus of Christianity toward establishing a world empire for his benefit in the name of God rather than establishing the Kingdom of God in the hearts of the people. Christianity became paganized, a far cry from Jesus' life and teachings, and lacking any resemblance to the gatherings of the first disciples of Christ.

However even today, God continues to love each of us as His children individually and gift us in unique ways that contribute to the whole of what He is doing in the earth and in His Kingdom. When we gather together, it is still God's desire for us to be like a symphony conducted by Jesus with each instrument playing its part as empowered by the Holy Spirit.

GREATEST IS LOVE

All of us can function in the gifts God has given us in ways that contribute to the Body of Christ and encourage each other in our faith. This said, spiritual maturity is something much greater than flowing spiritual gifts. Both individually and corporately, maturity is love. (See 1Corinthians 13.)

The earliest Christians were *cut to the heart* when they understood the love of God for them. To them, everything else seemed trivial by comparison. It was this revelation of the love of Jesus that made loving one another and sharing everything with one another so effortless. Jesus only gave one command to His disciples: to love one another as He loves us.

*John 15:12-14, 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. ... **This is my command: Love each other.***

We cannot love one another unless we truly know the love of Jesus for ourselves. Loving and serving each other entails trusting God enough to lay aside our own agendas, preferences, ambitions, and needs in order to submit ourselves to God and to one another. This is how the world will see that we are a fellowship of the family of God.

PRAYER FOR ONENESS

Scripture Reading

Read each of the following passages and then use the chart below for study and reflection.

- John 17

This was Jesus' prayer for His disciples before He went to the cross. What stands out to you?		
Summarize 3 prayer requests Jesus made to the Father in these passages.		
List three significant words or phrases that stood out to you.		
What insight does this give you about God's desire for unity in the Body of Christ?		
How does Jesus' example of prayer impact your prayer life for other believers or the Church?		
List three questions you still have about unity in the Church (locally or globally.)		
What is your conclusion about this passage?		



ONE ANOTHER

Scripture List*

Acts 4:32: All the believers were **one in heart and mind**. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had.

Mark 9:50: Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and **be at peace with each other**.

John 13:14: Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should **wash one another's feet**.

John 13:34-35: "A new command I give you: **Love one another**. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you **love one another**."

John 15:12, 17: My command is this: **Love each other as I have loved you...** This is my command: **Love each other**.

Romans 1:12: that is, that you and I may be **mutually encouraged by each other's faith**.

Romans 12:5,10,16: In Christ we, though many, form one body, and **each member belongs to all the others...** 10 **Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another** above yourselves... 16 **Live in harmony with one another**. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

Romans 13:8: Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to **love one another**, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.

Romans 14:13: Therefore let us **stop passing judgment on one another**. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in the way of a brother or sister.

Romans 15:5,7: May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the **same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had...** 7 **Accept one another**, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God.

Romans 15:14: I myself am convinced, my brothers and sisters, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with knowledge and competent to **instruct one another**.

Romans 16:16a: **Greet one another with a holy kiss**. (Also 1 Corinthians 16:20; 2 Corinthians 13:12; 1 Peter 5:14.)

1 Corinthians 1:10: I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you **agree with one another in what you say** and that there be **no divisions among you**, but that you be **perfectly united in mind and thought**.

1 Corinthians 12:25: so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have **equal concern for each other**.

2 Corinthians 13:11: Finally, brothers and sisters, rejoice! Strive for full restoration, **encourage one another, be of one mind, live in peace**. And the God of love and peace will be with you.

Galatians 5:13,15,26: You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, **serve one another humbly in love**... 15 If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other... 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

Galatians 6:2: **Carry each other's burdens**, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Ephesians 4:2: Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, **bearing with one another in love**.

Ephesians 4:25,32: Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and **speak truthfully to your neighbor**, for we are all members of one body... 32 **Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other**, just as in Christ God forgave you.

Ephesians 5:21: **Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ**.

Philippians 2:3,5: Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility **value others above yourselves**... 5 In your **relationships with one another**, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

Colossians 3:9, 13,16: **Do not lie to each other**, since you have taken off your old self with its practices... 13 **Bear with each other and forgive one another** if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you... 16 Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts.

1Thessalonians 3:12: May the Lord make your **love increase and overflow for each other** and for everyone else, just as ours does for you.

1Thessalonians 4:9: Now about your **love for one another** we do not need to write to you, for you yourselves have been taught by God to love each other.

1Thessalonians 5:11,15: Therefore **encourage one another and build each other up**, just as in fact you are doing... 15: Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to **do what is good for each other** and for everyone else.

2Thessalonians 1:3: We ought always to thank God for you, brothers and sisters, and rightly so, because your faith is growing more and more, and the **love all of you have for one another is increasing**.

Titus 3:3: At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, **being hated and hating one another**.

Hebrews 3:13: 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 10:24-25: And let us consider how we may **spur one another on toward love and good deeds**, not giving up **meeting together**, as some are in the habit of doing, but **encouraging one another**--and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 13:1: Keep **on loving one another as brothers and sisters**.

James 4:11: Brothers and sisters, **do not slander one another**. Anyone who speaks against a brother or sister or judges them speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it.

James 5:9: **Don't grumble against one another**, brothers and sisters, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!

James 5:16: Therefore **confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed.** The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.

1Peter 1:22: Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you **have sincere love for each other, love one another deeply, from the heart.**

1Pe 3:8: Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble.

1Peter 4:9: **Offer hospitality to one another** without grumbling.

1Peter 5:5: In the same way, you who are younger, submit yourselves to your elders. All of you, clothe yourselves with **humility toward one another**, because, "God opposes the proud but shows favor to the humble."

1John 1:7: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we **have fellowship with one another**, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin.

1John 3:11,23: For this is the message you heard from the beginning: **We should love one another...** 23: And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and **to love one another as he commanded us.**

1John 4:7,11,12: Dear friends, let us **love one another**, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God... 11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to **love one another...** 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we **love one another**, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us.

2John 1:5: And now, dear lady, I am not writing you a new command but one we have had from the beginning. I ask that we **love one another.**



ONE ANOTHER WORKSHEET

Accompanies One Anothers Scripture List

John 13:34-35: A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.

1. Read through the **One Anothers Scripture List**. What is the Lord highlighting to you in these Scriptures?

2. What did Jesus mean when He said, "As I have loved you..."

3. In the past and present, how have your responses to others **not** demonstrated the love of Jesus?

4. Select one Scripture for you from the One Anothers Scripture List. Slowly read this Scripture out loud three times. What do you sense the Lord speaking to you through this Scripture?

5. In what ways is God asking you to walk and live in more love for others?

6. How will you continue to walk in faith rather than slipping back into old patterns?

7. Praise God for what He has done for you. Jesus is King!

CARING CORRECTLY

1 Thessalonians 5:14 NIV – And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.

DESCRIPTION

Loving others as Jesus loves us includes understanding how to recognize what state they are in on their journey with Him. Jesus warned us not to judge by outward appearances but to judge with righteousness. For example, perhaps what appears to be idleness is actually someone who is intently waiting upon the Lord. Maybe what looks like disruption is actually a disheartened person in need of encouragement. Possibly what seems to be faithless is actually one who is weak and in need of help.

Only the Lord knows each of our hearts and His desire is for us to love one another well. He is willing to share His insight with us so we can be and do for others what they need at the right time in their lives.

As such, purifying Caring Correctly into practice is about seeking the Lord for His input about what another person is actually in need of so we can love them the way Jesus wants us to.

CONSIDERATIONS

Has there been a time when you felt misunderstood by others or that they cared for you incorrectly? How could they have Cared Correctly for you?

Has someone Cared Correctly for you but you did not appreciate or recognize it at first? How so? When did you recognize that they had Cared Correctly for you?

Have you ever misunderstood or cared for someone incorrectly? How could you have handled the situation differently?

In what ways did Jesus Care Correctly? Did He give people what they demanded or what they needed? Who did He take His directions from?



PURPOSE:

To accurately discern the spiritual state of others so that we can care for them correctly.

To love others well by doing what is right for them rather than what they want.

SPIRITUAL FRUIT:

Love for others.

Improved kindness for others on their journey with Jesus.

Increased discernment of phases of spiritual life.

PRAYER

Father, thank you that you sent Jesus to demonstrate how to care for people the way you want me to. Help me to learn from you about what others need before jumping to conclusions or making wrong judgments. Teach me how to love the way you do. In Jesus' name, Amen.

PRACTICE

1. Ask the Lord to highlight someone to you that He would like you to Care Correctly for.
2. From your perspective, write down how you see their situation, behavior, attitude, etc.
 - What does it look like to you?
 - How are you inclined to handle the situation?
 - Are there feelings that come up for you when you think about this? Does it make you angry, sad, fearful, etc?
 - Does it remind you of incidents you've had with them in the past? With others? Is this the same or different?
3. Shift from your own perspective. Ask the Holy Spirit about this person and their situation.
 - Ask God to show you what is really going on with them.
 - Ask God to reveal the truth to you about the situation.
 - Ask God what they need from you at this time in their life.
4. Take note of the differences between your impressions from #2 and God's insights from #3.
 - How are they different? How are they similar?
 - What did God show you that you had not considered?
 - Was there any way that your emotions or past experiences were hindering your perspective of the situation? How so?
5. Ask God how He wants you to do to Care Correctly for this person. With His help, do what He tells you.

NOTES:



ADDITIONAL SCRIPTURES:

Romans 14:1

1 Thessalonians 2:11

Titus 3:10

1 Corinthians 13:4

2 Thessalonians 3:15

1 Corinthians 5:11

Hebrews 10:24

Ephesians 4:29

John 7:24

UNIT THREE – KEY QUESTIONS

The Community of God

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

What is God's design for Christian community?	
What happens when we are baptized?	What is communion?
What is the authority of the Church?	How are believers supposed to resolve conflicts?
Why do believers need one another? What is God's view of diversity and unity?	How does God want us to love one another?
What is one thing you learned that you did not know before?	What questions do you still have about this subject?

BAPTISM BY IMMERSION

DESCRIPTION

Baptism is an outward demonstration of the change that took place in our heart when we believed Jesus Christ as our Lord and Savior. Jesus Christ commanded all of His disciples to baptize new disciples in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Baptism in Christ's day was done through full immersion under water. In fact, even Jesus was baptized in this way. This type of baptism is rooted in a practice ordained in God's Law for ritual cleansing, called a *mikveh* in Hebrew. Ritual cleansing like this was required of priests before they could serve God and was required of common people in order to remain clean before God. For believers today, this type of baptism symbolizes our inclusion in Christ's death and resurrection. Our old self dies as it is submerged under the water and we emerge out of the water as a new creation in Christ. As we are literally submerged into the waters of baptism, we figuratively include ourselves in the death of Jesus and we put to death the sinful nature we inherited from Adam. Coming up out of the waters of baptism signifies our participation in Jesus' resurrection. Our old life is rolled away and we emerge as a new creation in Christ. Hallelujah!

If you or anyone in your group has not been water baptized, it can be done by your fellow disciples in any body of water, including a pond, the ocean, or a bathtub. It is a time for great rejoicing as a fellow believer commits themselves to Jesus and demonstrates their new life in the New Covenant with God.

SCRIPTURE PORTION

Matthew 28:19-20 NIV - "Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age."

GROUP PRACTICE

1. Prepare:
 - Ask the group if there is anyone who has not been baptized who wants to be.
 - Ask the group if there was anyone who was baptized or sprinkled as a child who wants to affirm their faith and/or rededicate their life to Christ.
 - Meet with the people who want to be baptized before the day of baptism in order to discuss with them the seriousness of this act of faith and their understanding of the commitment they are entering into.
 - Determine which body of water you will gather at to submerge these believers in baptism.
2. Before baptizing someone, have them affirm their faith in Jesus Christ. Ask them:
 - Do you believe that Jesus is Lord?
 - Do you believe that God raised Jesus from the dead?
 - Wait for their genuine response of faith through verbal spoken agreement or affirmation of these statements.
3. Pray for them and listen to anything the Holy Spirit may desire for you to say to them at this very special time in their life of faith.
 - Allow members of the group to offer words of prayer and/or encouragement for the person being baptized.
4. When you are both ready, say to them: "I baptize you in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit."
 - Submerge them under the water and help to raise them up out of the water.
5. Rejoice! Affirm them as a child of God and a new creation in Christ. Welcome them into God's family and God's Kingdom!



PURPOSE:

Outwardly demonstrate our inner and eternal covenant commitment to Jesus Christ.

Be cleansed from the old and emerge as a new creation.

GROUP SIZE:

Any size group.

SCRIPTURES

Mark 16:1-6
 Matthew 28:19
 1 Peter 3:21
 Romans 6:3-4
 Colossians 2:11-12
 1 Corinthians 12:13
 Acts 2:38
 Acts 8:38
 Acts 9:18
 Acts 10:47
 Acts 22:16

UNIT THREE: GROUP EXERCISES – TWO OPTIONS

COMMUNION TOGETHER

DESCRIPTION

Jesus Christ is our eternal Passover Lamb. Like the Israelites painted the blood of the lamb on their doorposts to be protected from the destroyer, Jesus shed His blood so that our sins are forgiven.

Through His blood painted on the doorposts of our hearts, we can be protected from destruction of sin, the world, the flesh, and the evil one. Jesus' body was broken so that we can freely enter into the presence of God to worship. When we take communion, we remember His great deliverance and what Jesus Christ did for us and receive in ourselves the life of God.

The first disciples of Christ took communion (or "broke bread") regularly. Consecrated bread and wine were made readily available for believers to serve themselves or take communion together. As a holy nation and a royal priesthood, every believer is a priest of God and able to administer the body and blood of Christ with due reverence. (1 Peter 2:9) This said, communion and the benefits of Christ's sacrifice are only available to those who believe that Jesus is Lord and that God raised Him from the dead. This means that if you do not yet believe in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior, you should abstain from communion or better yet, believe Jesus and partake.

Practicing the partaking of Communion is about commemorating Christ's sacrifice, renewing our faith in what He has done for us, and to looking forward to His return.

As you take communion together as a group, take a moment to look around the room at the people of God. These are your people. We are one nation, one people, one family, one body, one Kingdom chosen by God to be His. Hallelujah!

SCRIPTURE PORTION

Luke 22:19-20 NIV - And he took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, "This is my body given for you; do this in remembrance of me." In the same way, after the supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood, which is poured out for you.

GROUP PRACTICE

- Prepare the bread and wine.
 - Consecrate the bread and wine to the Lord by praying over them. For example, "I consecrate this bread and wine to the Lord for holy use and purpose."
 - Do not use this bread or wine for casual snacking.
- Perceive the body and blood of Jesus.
 - Jesus said of the bread and wine, "this is my body" and, "this is my blood" even when He still had a natural body.
 - Read the Communion Scriptures about what the body and blood of Jesus have done for us.
 - Believe that these Scriptures apply to the body and blood you are about to partake of.
- Examine yourself and your faith.
 - Do you believe that Jesus Christ shed His blood for the forgiveness of your sins?
 - Do you believe that you are totally forgiven?
 - Do you believe that you can receive all of the benefits of Christ body and blood through faith in Jesus?
- Optional: Have people share one aspect of Christ's sacrifice that they are focusing on as they take Communion today.
- Remember the Lord's death and proclaim His return.
 - Praise God that because of Jesus's sacrifice, you are protected from the destroyer until Jesus returns.
- Partake.
 - As you eat the body and drink the blood of Jesus, be consciously strengthened with the life and power of God in your inmost being. The indestructible life of Christ and the same power that raised Christ from the dead is in you.
- Praise God and rejoice in His salvation!



PURPOSE:

- To remember, honor, and revere Christ's sacrifice of atonement on our behalf.
- To rejoice in God's salvation and the way that God has made for us to be saved.
- To partake of the life of God.

GROUP SIZE:

Any size group.

SCRIPTURE PORTIONS:

- John 1:29
- 1 Corinthians 5:7
- Luke 22:15-20
- Matthew 26:26-28
- Mark 14:17-25
- John 13:21-30
- John 6:53-57
- 1 Corinthians 11:23-34

