

God Has Designed You For Unity

God's nature is such that He exists as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in perfect unity.

You cannot think of heaven without savoring the harmony that exists where God's rule is perfectly experienced. Fashioned in His image, everything about you is designed to come alive in this environment of total unity.

Alignment, agreement, connection, coordination, synchronization, orchestration, interdependence, mutuality: all of these peaceful, pleasant sensations flow forth from the experience of unity. No wonder, for God's life flows through human channels when the connections are intact.

There is your connection with God. There is the unity within your own person, which is so different from the divided heart or the double mind. There is the oneness of your marriage, unity with family, friends, as well as your brothers and sisters in Christ. At so many points God's provision flows or is withheld depending upon the connection.

You were born for unity, and that is where you prosper. In fact, it is only by living properly with others that enables your potential to emerge.

Sin shattered this harmony; and the curse that makes life so hard is our predisposition to disunity. Thus our salvation is sometimes described by one word: reconciliation. Oh how hard it is for humans to live together in agreement! Even when we briefly taste it at a special conference or on a honeymoon, we know we were meant to live in this state.

Imagine living in continual harmony within the Christian community. It sounds like heaven on earth, and it also sounds impossible. But it is, nevertheless, God's plan for us. This is His vision. Let us embrace nothing less.

Satan understood the strategic nature of our unity; thus his plan to deceive, to trick our forbearers into breaking the unity. What tragedy followed! No human could have anticipated the evil that would result.

Most of the heartache and pain that we wade through on a daily basis comes from the tensions created by misunderstandings, accusations, withdrawals, and the resulting breakdown of relationships.

Strange, then, that Christians do not seem to recognize the importance of unity and guard it accordingly.

The purpose of this month's study is to motivate and equip Christians to live together in the bond of peace. It is what you crave. It is where you will experience the desires of your heart.

Lesson 1

God created everything originally to express something found in Himself. Thus as you examine His nature, you learn a great deal about His intentions for your life.

There has never been a disagreement within the Godhead. God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit exist in perfect harmony.

Jesus demonstrated the love, the trust, and the dependence upon His Father that flowed from a unity that lies right at the heart of God's creation.

Scripture Study: Read Deuteronomy 6:4. *(15 minutes)*

What do you think the Lord wanted His people to know by this frequently repeated statement?

Read about the plurality within the Godhead found in Genesis 1:26 and Genesis 3:22. Why is it important to understand both the plurality of God and the oneness of God?

Jesus identified Himself as God; yet He was clearly teaching that there was only one God. Read Mark 12:29. Why is this unity within the nature of God important?

Read 1 Corinthians 11:3 where there is described something about how Jesus Christ exists in unity with His Father. How should this model of relationship within the Godhead affect our human relationships?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Quietly ponder the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in their perfect unity.

Worship God in His beauty and mystery!

Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you.

Rely upon the Spirit to direct your prayer.

Lesson 2

Jesus taught us to pray for God's will to be performed on earth as it is in heaven, thus assuming that we know that heaven expresses God's will perfectly.

When we see Him, we shall be like Him. The entire sin nature will be replaced with His nature, so that in heaven we will have no capacity to sin.

Love, harmony, submission from the heart, affection for everyone, patience, a desire to bless others and to serve others: these things will be part of all that will be in the immediate presence of God for all eternity. There will be no arguments, no misunderstandings, no gossip, and no broken relationships in this glorious home that is heaven!

Scripture Study: Read Revelation 21:1-8. *(15 minutes)*

What picturesque language is used to describe the Church?

What do you see here that is the fulfillment of God's heart?

What will be the effects upon us?

What will happen to anything or anyone that could possibly cause disunity?

With the future described here for the Church, how do you think God intends His people to live now?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Quietly meditate upon being with God in heaven.

Surrender to Him every care, every worry, and every tension.

Pray for those who have hurt you.

By faith receive His love for your brothers and sisters in Christ.

Lesson 3

What made Eden paradise? Was it not that His image in us was not marred so that the fellowship with God and one another was not troubled with any disunity? There was no death, because there was no sin, no disconnect with anyone.

There was no shame, no hiding, no fear, no misunderstanding, no wounding, and no pain. There was a brief period when a man and a woman lived together in the type of harmony that is characteristic of heaven. No wonder that we think of it as paradise; and no wonder that every heart yearns for this.

Scripture Study: Read Genesis 1:26-28 and Genesis 3:8. (*10 minutes*)

In Genesis 1:26-28, what do you learn about God's intentions and therefore our ultimate potential?

In Genesis 3:8, what do you learn about this paradise before it was shattered with disunity?

Scripture Study: Read Genesis 2:7-10 and Genesis 2:15-17. (*5 minutes*)

In the midst of our roots grew what tree?

What do you think the tree of the knowledge of good and evil represents?

When disunity struck, even though it began with our unity with God, it immediately did the same to our unity with each other. What is the meaning to the fact that the tree of life was taken away from man?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Receive afresh the reconciliation to God through your union with Christ.

By faith depend upon Christ's righteousness.
Grant forgiveness to anyone who has wronged you.
Pray for God to restore the unity among His people.

Lesson 4

What is the essence of sin? Is it not a misplacement, a misalignment of something God arranged? Is it not a discord, a disease, a broken connection that begins with God and then transfers immediately to man?

Sin causes the flow of life-giving peace and joy to cease, and introduces the condition we call death. This terrible experience is what humans feel when we are no longer functioning in the order created by God.

This is apparent in Jesus' declaration that the second commandment, to "love your neighbor," is like the first commandment, to "love God."

Scripture Study: Read Genesis 3:1-19 with the idea that sin is an attack upon our unity in your mind. (*15 minutes*)

Why would Satan want to create disunity?

How did he go about tempting our first parents to break the unity?

What were the results of disunity?

How does Satan tempt you to break the relational connections in your life?

Does thinking of sin in terms of breaking the unity help you to see your life situations more clearly? _____ How?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Thank Jesus for reuniting you with the Father.

Come to Him as His child. Just be with Him.

By faith partake of His life.

Unload your hurts and worries and cares upon your Savior.

Lesson 5

Sin deceives us by causing us to think that we can experience happiness and fulfillment in ways not designed by God. So when we sin, we think that we are doing what will increase our happiness. This is the nature of sin and its accompanying deception. “Everyone does what is right in his own eyes.”

The cost of deciding for ourselves what is best is very high. Most of the pain in your life has come from words and attitudes that are not in agreement with the way God works.

How many damaged or broken relationships surround your life? Each one introduces the loss of unity and blessing that God desires for you.

Scripture Study: Think through the implications for yourself and for the people you know as you read the sad story of Cain in Genesis 4:1-12. (*15 minutes*)

How do you think “the tempter” worked on Cain to get him to commit such a terrible thing?

How might Cain have stopped short of this sin and regained a proper perspective on his own feelings, his brother, and God?

How are you sometimes tempted to break fellowship with another person?

Even though you would not actually murder someone, what lessons can you learn from studying “The Case of Cain” so that you are not duped by the devil to destroy the unity with a brother?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Ask the Lord if there is resentment in your heart toward anyone.

Look to Jesus where He died with your sins placed upon Him.

Receive His cleansing and freedom from the curse of resentment.

Pray for those who have hurt you.

Lesson 6

Think back to those times in your life in which you were experiencing the most unity with people. Can you feel the peace and security of those times? Isn't that what you were made for?

If you want wisdom, then respect unity and guard it as something highly valued by God.

Begin to see your life situations in terms of staying in tune with God first but others as well.

Scripture Study: Read Psalm 133. It was meant to be sung corporately as God's people ascended to worship at the temple. *(15 minutes)*

What do you think is the purpose of this Psalm?

What was David's experience with disunity that might have played a role in him being used to write such a song?

A simile is a comparison of two different things introduced by "like" or "as." What does unity seem like in God's eyes?

Why do you think I would make the following statement: "The cross of Christ was the cost of restoring unity"?

Since most Christians know and believe Psalm 133, why do you think disunity remains such a problem?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Thank Father God for sending Jesus to restore your unity.

Worship Jesus as He suffered the death caused by your sins.

Ask God for wisdom in responding to hurts.

Ask God to make you a true peacemaker among brethren.

Lesson 7

Have you ever asked yourself why Jesus said peacemakers are uniquely spotted as “sons of God”? When the angels were introducing the birth of Christ, they specifically connected God’s glory with the issue of bringing peace on earth. (Luke 2:14)

Obviously Jesus was not thinking about making peace with sin. The peacemaker will have to compromise on his feelings, preferences, and opinions; but he cannot accommodate sin. That would not be the peace of God.

The peacemaker will have to constantly experience the cross himself and be willing to help others come to the same cross, for here only is the place of freedom.

Scripture Study: Read Matthew 5:9. *(10 minutes)*

If you are to be a Kingdom man or woman, why do you think you must be a peacemaker?

It is probably fair to say that not every Christian embraces this role of being a peacemaker. Why would you think a Believer might not have this value and thus not be called a peacemaker today?

Scripture Study: Now compare Matthew 10:34-37 with Jesus’ prior call to be a peacemaker.

(5 minutes)

Why is this saying of Jesus not a contradiction to our being peacemakers?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Ask God to show you the difference between your strong opinions where compromise is required and sin where you must not compromise.

Ask God to give you such love for others that you can be a peacemaker.

Ask God to use you to stop gossip.

Worship God as the One who brings reconciliation between people.

Lesson 8

Christians have very different, strongly held “convictions” which in many cases do not qualify as true convictions. To violate a Biblical conviction means to sin, but what usually separates people are tightly held opinions. This is a tragedy; and when we participate in such “unlawful separations” we grieve the Spirit. On the other hand, the Bible clearly teaches us about some character traits to avoid. Certainly the gossip and slanderer and divisive person are in this category, as well as liars or those controlled by anger.

Become a thoughtful Christian who carefully thinks through the issues that trouble you. Learn to distinguish between your strong emotions about something that is not clearly revealed in Scripture and what is genuinely called sin in the Bible.

Scripture Study: Paul gets toward the later part of his letter to the Roman Church, and he begins to speak to them in order to help them maintain the unity that is necessary if the Church is to impact the culture around her. Read Romans 12:16-21. (*15 minutes*) Examine Romans 12:18. Why do you think Paul qualified this command with, “if possible”?

If someone does not wish to be at peace with you, what is your attitude to be?

When Paul (speaking for God) commands you to be at peace with all men as far as it depends on you, what does this mean to you in the places where you are disagreeing with a brother?

What do you think Paul means by this final command to not be overcome by evil? How are you to not be overcome by evil in this context of relationships?

These are strong orders that the Holy Spirit is speaking to your soul today. Explain how these orders are seeking to bring you into freedom and keep you there.

Which command in this passage is the hardest for you?
_____ Why?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Ask God's forgiveness for any disobedience you see in yourself.

Now take the command you have violated and see it as a promise from God, for He will perform it in your life.

Praise God for His wisdom and for His grace!

Pray for those who have troubled you.

Lesson 9

God created us to process information differently. Some are visual learners while others are auditory learners. One person's first response is for compassion while for another, it is truth or principle. Some are almost entirely relational while others are focused upon facts.

Our backgrounds powerfully influence the "lens" through which we view things. One was an alcoholic, while another was abused. Some have been deserted by a mate. Others are passionate about a nation they visited. One feels compassion for the homosexual, another for the marginalized artists; still another for the stay-at-home mothers.

How will God develop and maintain unity with such a diverse group? Not only does Scripture anticipate this issue, it goes even further by seeing God display His wisdom in building such people into a unified family! Heaven is foreshadowed on earth!

Scripture Study: Paul lays out a theology for unity in Romans 12:3-8. (*15 minutes*)

What is Paul's initial warning?

All Christians have saving faith, yet we differ in the ways our faith in Christ expresses itself. Paul is not saying that all people have faith; but that all Christians have faith with the "measure" or "type" assigned to them by God.

How does Paul try to solve the problems caused by various people seeing things in different ways?

Paul names seven different types of graces; and while we are all to participate in them all at some level, we seem to find that we especially gravitate toward one or two of these activities. Which ones best describe you, and how do you think this influences the way you interpret things around you?

When you disagree with a brother or sister, do you intentionally try to understand the person in terms of having different graces? _____ What is God teaching you about this?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Has pride threatened your unity with man or God?

Look to Jesus as He takes your pride and gives you His humility.

Rejoice in His acceptance and His righteousness.

Pray for your brothers and sisters who need fresh grace.

Lesson 10

The entire letter of 1 Corinthians was written to the First Charismatic Church of Corinth, because they were quarreling, disagreeing about a number of practical issues, criticizing their leaders, and forming factions who were pushing their various agendas.

When you read this letter and “hear” Paul as he addresses their problems in order to re-establish unity, you will receive fresh guidance and wisdom for how you are to respond to people or situations which irritate you or tempt you to act unwisely.

Remember, not every Christian who first received this letter would have been happy with some of Paul’s answers. We don’t know if these passed their tests. We hope so. But what about you; will you pass your tests?

Scripture Study: Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-11. (*10 minutes*)

Read these verses carefully and name all the problems you see which were threatening the success of this Church.

What is Paul’s goal for them?

Is this an impossible goal?

What happens when Christians do not adopt this goal?

Why does Paul exhort them by the name of Jesus Christ? What’s his point?

Scripture Study: Now delve further into the cause of their quarrels and divisions by reading 1 Corinthians 3:1-4. (*5 minutes*)

Finish this sentence: “It is our flesh which

_____.”
If we are truly spiritual people, how will we handle conflict?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

If you see an attitude that needs to change, bring it to the Lord.

Quietly wait on the Lord. Give Him room to bring a thought to your mind.

By faith, enter into His rest this morning.

Praise Him that He is in control!

Lesson 11

There were lots of problems in this Church. At their love feasts some were drunk. There were disruptions and disorder in their worship services. Some identified with one leader and considered themselves superior to the others. One man was living with his father's wife! Some were settling their disputes in the law courts! Somebody was teaching that there is no resurrection.

Notice that Paul used the authority that God had given him, for if this dreadful situation was to be helped, there had to be leadership.

No leadership is perfect; but without godly authority there never will be unity. Paul's authority was unique, but even today there must be wise, clear leadership in order to help Christians not quarrel and separate.

Scripture Study: Read 1 Corinthians 4:6-21 in order to learn about some of their wrong attitudes toward their spiritual fathers. (*10 minutes*)

What was Paul facing?

Did Paul allow criticism to stop him from using his authority in a responsible way?

_____ How did he do that?

What are some of the attributes of a good leader that you see in this passage?

Do you think you value the leader or leaders God has put in your life as He desires? Elaborate.

Scripture Study: Read 1 Corinthians 14:37-40. (*5 minutes*)

What do you think would have happened to this Church if Paul had not made such clear decisions about how the Church was to function?

How do you think God intends to use godly leaders today to help His churches stay in unity?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Thank God for giving you leadership through humans.

Submit yourself afresh to how God wants to order His Church.

Commit yourself to act as a spiritual Christian rather than a fleshly Christian.

Pray for unity in your Church.

Lesson 12

What is the solution for disunity? Paul uses a number of things: (1) the cross, (2) his example, (3) an appeal to be spiritual, (4) an assessment of their actual condition, (5) several serious warnings, (6) the appeal of a spiritual father, (7) the use of his authority to give decisions about matters which troubled them, and (8) several sections of instruction which were designed to bring them into agreement with God and one another.

Paul has diagnosed the problem that allows Christians to participate in disunity and justify it: our flesh! The “flesh” is the Bible word for that part of us which breaks the unity of the Spirit with others. No Christian is exempt from having to choose between doing what feels right or identifying with Christ on the cross.

Scripture Study: Paul lays down a base of teaching from which he can appeal to these fragmented Christians. Read 1 Corinthians 2:6-16. (*5 minutes*)

Paul probably is saying that the mature Christian is also the spiritual one. How does he characterize this mature person?

Of course, the “natural man” is the unregenerate one who would not be able to track with the wisdom that comes from God.

How does this discussion lay the groundwork for the appeal he will then make to them in chapter 3?

Scripture Study: Read again Paul’s diagnosis of the complex problems facing this Church in

1 Corinthians 3:1-4. (*10 minutes*)

What does Paul call these Christians?

What are some of the obvious symptoms that a Christian is defaulting to his flesh?

Are you contending for unity among the Christians in your Church? Comment on your role in creating that which honors God in unifying His people.

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*
Bring your struggles with your flesh into God’s light.
Embrace the cross of Christ so that you can be set free!
Worship your Savior for His power and love.
Pray for the unity in your Church.

Lesson 13

The gospel is the solution to all relational problems, for only here is the power and wisdom of God released so as to free us from the guilt, shame, and bondage of those sins which separate us from both God and people.

In this letter, Paul calls the gospel, “the word of the cross.”

Christians have two problems: (1) first, we may not understand that the solution to our relational stresses is found in the word of the cross, and (2) secondly, we often forget to implement God’s wisdom and power when we are feeling the strong emotions of our flesh.

Scripture Study: Read the amazing words found in 1 Corinthians 1:18-31. (*10 minutes*)
What do you think Paul means by saying that the word of the cross is the power of God?

It is the power of God to accomplish what?

Why does the word of the cross seem like a foolish message to those who are perishing?

If Christians both understood the word of the cross and utilized it, what changes do you think you would see in the Church?

What do you think Paul means by, “we preach Christ crucified” (1 Corinthians 1:23)?

Why do you think Paul raises the issue of them not being considered the wise, the mighty or the noble by the society?

In 1 Corinthians 1:30, how would you explain Paul’s thought here to a new Believer?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Come with fresh appreciation to Christ who was crucified.

Exchange your lack for His adequacy (righteousness).

Worship Him as the glorious Savior!

Pray for your friends to experience the wisdom and power of God.

Lesson 14

When Christians argue and separate for reasons that are not Biblical, they do not consider the damage they do to the Body of Christ. So Paul took this opportunity to warn Christians about the seriousness of dividing the Church.

Warning American Christians today is a delicate business, for it can appear as a strong-arm tactic or manipulation; and indeed some leaders have succumbed to inappropriate use of warnings.

However, Paul is not reluctant to use warnings, and he does so several times in this one letter. There are consequences to our actions, and love must sometimes help people to consider God's view of a situation. It is a wise person who knows how to benefit from a godly warning.

Scripture Study: Read Paul's brilliant combination of appeal and warning in 1 Corinthians 3:10-23. (*10 minutes*)

What appeals (which are not exactly warnings) do you see in this text?

What are Paul's warnings in this text?

What is Paul's major warning?

How does Paul's major warning affect your attitude toward brothers and sisters with whom you have disagreed?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Wait upon the Lord this morning.

If you need His forgiveness, please come and receive it.

Surrender yourself to live for His pleasure and glory.

Pray for His purposes to be released into your life.

Lesson 15

Most Christians lead something. It may be in a home, your children, a ministry, others at your work place, or some position within the Church. You have influence with some people, and this is what leadership is about.

Your example determines the impact of your life. No matter who sees or does not see your choices to renounce your flesh with its temptations, God sees; and this is the true measure of a man or woman.

Whether we mean to or not, we are all broadcasting, “Do as I do, for I am a follower of Jesus Christ.”

Scripture Study: Read Paul’s life message in 1 Corinthians 2:1-5. (*15 minutes*)

What do you think Paul means by, “the testimony of God”?

What did Paul determine, and what did he mean by this statement?

Could you follow this type of leadership?

What would change if you determined to lead or use your influence the same way as Paul?

When you read about how Paul felt: weak, fearful, trembling, how does this make you feel?

Finish this sentence: “The best leaders

_____.”

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Ask the Lord to give you His influence with others.

Thank Jesus for giving you His life and power while you feel weak.
Declare the faithfulness of God over your life.
By faith receive the blessings of God through Christ.

Lesson 16

The serious attempt to live in unity with other Christians reveals our weaknesses. Staying in order to achieve unity by the cross as opposed to separating is how Christian character is formed.

God has His purposes in allowing us to experience conflict with our brothers and sisters. When we “duck out,” we surrender the ground rather than take it for Christ; and the result is that we lose the opportunity to be changed by the power of the cross.

Generally, God does not lead us into a change of location until we have embraced the cross and learned our lessons in our present circumstances. That is called, promotion.

Scripture Study: Rejoice in the promise of 1 Corinthians 10:13. (*5 minutes*)

The context of this verse is dealing with both immorality and complaining, so it applies to all the temptations of your flesh.

Use your own words to express this verse, but begin this way: “When I come into conflict with a brother or sister,

_____.”

Scripture Study: Consider 1 Corinthians 3:11-15 in the context of your relationships with people.

(*10 minutes*)

Finish this sentence: In 1 Corinthians 3:11, Paul says that you have Christ’s righteousness as the foundation of your life, but now

_____.

What does Paul mean by, “wood, hay, straw”?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Bring your wood, hay, and straw to the cross and receive His gold.

Worship the God of second and third chances!

Pray blessings upon those who have troubled your life!

Ask the Lord to use you today to touch someone with Christ’s love.

Lesson 17

It costs to pursue spiritual gifts in order to be used by God to benefit others; but oh how much more does love cost!

Not that there is an “either/or” here. In fact, it is love that spurs us to earnestly reach beyond ourselves to have some of the Spirit’s supernatural gifts flowing from us, whether at work, at home, or at Church.

But what does love mean when we are in conflict with a brother? And where do we obtain such love, for it is not within the unaided human to love with God’s love? It is found only in the crucified One.

Scripture Study: Now that you have been studying 1 Corinthians with a view to the quarrels, conflicts, and factions which elicited this letter, perhaps “the Love Chapter,” 1 Corinthians 13, will take on new implications. Read chapter 13. *(15 minutes)*

Finish this sentence: “The reason Paul included this chapter in 1 Corinthians was

_____.”

When you think about your broken relationships in light of this chapter, what are your thoughts? Express your thoughts to God.

Relationships that were broken because sin forced the Church to disfellowship him or her are not in this category. We are not to fellowship those who claim to be Christian but live in adultery, or lie, or steal, or practice homosexuality, or such disqualifying sins. Paul covers one list in 1 Corinthians 6:9-10. In fact, it is love for the person to not act as if all were well and continue to pal around as though God was not being dishonored.

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Use your own need for love to receive more of Christ’s love.

Ask Jesus Christ for His love for those who are disturbing you.

Pray for unity in your Church body.

Ask the Lord to use you as a genuine peacemaker.

Lesson 18

We live in a “divorce culture” where people attempt to relieve the pain of their relationships by simply leaving. This not only applies to the most sacred relationship, marriage, but it extends to how Americans respond to strains on any relationship. The skills of repairing and maintaining relationships are unknown.

It is the Church that is to model these skills. We are called “the outpost of heaven.” We are the colony which God has sent to dramatize His wisdom in how to grow together with people who have very different opinions.

We are attempting to do what the world does not: put people of different cultures and backgrounds together and have them overcome the challenges that threaten to tear people apart.

Scripture Study: Read 1 Corinthians 11:18-19 as Paul continues to stay with his theme. (10 minutes)

What must it seem like to our heavenly Father when His children gather for communion and there are Christians who are not wishing to see one another or to sit next to each other, yet they all come to the communion table? Comment on this sad situation. Does this ever happen to you?

What do you think Paul means in 1 Corinthians 11:19 when he speaks of “those who are approved”?

If some are approved, who are those who are not approved?

Scripture Reflection: It would seem that 1 Corinthians 12:25 is the major point of the entire 12th chapter. (5 minutes)

What is your opinion about this statement?

Prayer Time: (15 – 30 minutes)

Draw near to your heavenly Father.

Wait upon Him.

Listen. Respond.

Pray for the relationships in your local Church to be restored.

Lesson 19

What is the cost of disunity?

Certainly it is the loss of peace. It is the loss of fellowship and the joy and comfort that flows from experiencing “koinonia” (having life in common).

Synergism is the multiplying effect of our lives merging; and that is lost.

And what about God’s answers to our prayers? Disunity greatly diminishes the effectiveness of prayer. Apparently, He puts our willingness to live together in peace ahead of some other needs.

Scripture Study: Peter exhorts both wives and husbands in 1 Peter 3:1-7. *(15 minutes)*
Use one sentence to summarize Peter’s word to wives.

In speaking to both the wives and the husbands, Peter begins with “in the same way.” To what is he referring?

How should a husband take Peter’s warning at the conclusion of 1 Peter 3:7?

What does Peter want husbands to do on a continuing basis in order to not short-circuit their prayer requests?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Surrender your resentments, your keeping score to God.

Acknowledge God’s love for you in putting you in these circumstances.

Praise Him for His being in control instead of yourself.

Wait on Him for His wisdom.

Lesson 20

Our flesh is an easy target. Our insecurities, our fears, our suspicions leave us vulnerable to “suggestions” which tend to fester and take on a life of their own. Isn’t it amazing how quickly we find ourselves putting up inner defenses? These, of course, are the invisible walls of separation.

After all, we aren’t innocent, naïve children any longer. We have many experiences from the past, and some of these emotions are easily triggered.

But, what if it is God engineering things in order to set you free? What if it glorifies God every time you feel the force of your flesh but instead you choose to reach, to bear with, to patiently trust God to repair the damage?

Scripture Study: Read James 1:13-15. Then read James 1:12. *(10 minutes)*

As you read this, what do you think is the purpose of temptation for a child of God?

What does James mean when he speaks about us when, “once we have been approved”?

Read James 1:19-21. How can this text help you to stay in unity with your brethren?

Read James 1:22-25. Speak to your own soul when you are tempted to cut and run from a difficult relationship. Say, “Soul,

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

Bring your temptations to the Lord this morning.

Seek His face.

As His child, receive His love and grace to meet your needs.

Pray for those who are testing your love.

Lesson 21

Often we discover that we have been carrying a deep but hidden wound which we did not recognize. God lets this area be brought to the surface when someone says or does something that touches this wound, and we find ourselves immediately angry or fearful in ways that we have a hard time controlling.

This situation tests whether or not we are willing to submit to the cross of Christ, for it is God's intention to heal us and free us at the cross.

A wounded spirit and an unbroken will leave a person open to developing a root of bitterness from which defiling disunity spreads.

Scripture Study: Read Ephesians 4:29-32. (*15 minutes*)

What are the reactions that Paul commands Christians to put away?

Do you have to contend with any of these reactions? _____ Which ones especially challenge the wellness of your soul?

Are there old wounds lurking deep within your soul which God wants to bring into the light so that you can experience freedom at the cross?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Read 1 John 1:7 before the Lord.

Step into the light by stating your sin clearly to God.

Recognize how your sin is hurting God.

Look to Christ dying on your behalf so He could forgive you and set you free.

Lesson 22

“There is a way which seems right, but in the end it is the way of death.” (Proverbs 14:12, Proverbs 16:25) What this means is that we may easily think something is right when, in fact, it is the opposite.

When we lose our peace, we have probably violated how God would have us think, feel, or speak.

Humility, patience, love, reconciliation, courage, longsuffering: all of these beautiful qualities should be flowing into your soul as you experience Christ as your righteousness.

Scripture Study: Read Hebrews 12:1-15 rather quickly through, and notice how it culminates with verse 15. (*15 minutes*)

Why do you think this text begins by directing your attention to Jesus?

In Hebrews 12:5, the author says to the readers: having “forgotten” something. What have they forgotten and how common is it for us to forget these things?

Reread Hebrews 12:14-15. What do you think the author means by “many be defiled”?

The command is to “pursue peace with all men.” How does this pursuit cause us to experience the sanctification spoken of in Hebrews 12:14?

How can a Christian “come short of the grace of God”?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Bow before your Father as His child.

Gladly submit to His discipline.
Thank Him for loving you and for engineering your freedom.
Worship Him!

Lesson 23

Division can result when a person with a mercy gift picks up the offense of someone who has been hurt within the Church community and champions his “cause.”

If you have a mercy gift or if you encounter someone who has been mistreated in a way in which you identify, your own character and wisdom will be tested.

Don’t take up the offense. Instead, lead the offended person through the biblical steps of reconciliation. Don’t become an accuser, but rather become a wise peacemaker.

Scripture Study: Read Hebrews 13:17. (*5 minutes*)

Write the meaning of this verse in your own words as applied to your own situation.

Scripture Study: Read Galatians 6:1-5. (*10 minutes*)

What is a Christian to do if one of his leaders appears to be doing something that seems wrong? First, what are some of the wrong ways to handle this situation?

What are some of the right things to do which would make you a part of the solution rather than compounding the problem?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Confess any wrong attitudes you find in yourself.

Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you with the mind of Christ.

Ask God for His wisdom in helping others stay in unity.

Pray for your leaders.

Lesson 24

Every follower of Christ has the ministry of preserving the unity of God's people.

We are to recognize sin beginning with ourselves, and we are to become mature, which means that we are to be champions of the Cross of Christ.

We represent Christ, and we know the tricks of the devil that seek to divide people and discredit God.

Scripture Study: Read 1 John 1:3-4, and 1 John 1:7-2:1. *(15 minutes)*

What is the joy that John is experiencing?

What does disunity do to this joy?

How does John anticipate Christians re-establishing their fellowship?

What kind of deception does John warn against?

Why do you think it should be easy for Christians to admit their own sinful attitudes or actions?

What do you think happens when a Christian only sees the sin of another and refuses to recognize sin in his own life?

Prayer Time: *(15 – 30 minutes)*

If you recognize sin in your soul, come to your Advocate.

Freely receive His forgiveness.
If you need to forgive someone, do it now.
Pray for the unity of your Christian community.

Lesson 25

Your own maturity and destiny are linked to your commitment to live together in unity with your brothers and sisters.

When you separate yourself from those God has placed in your life, you hinder the very purpose of God, for He plans to fit us together.

The Bride of Christ is composed of all those who truly know and follow Jesus Christ; but the reality of our connection to Christ is tested by our connection to others.

Scripture Study: Read Ephesians 4:15-16. (*15 minutes*)

What is our responsibility to speak to one another?

What is the effect upon one another when we actually speak the truth in love?

What happens when Christians either do not speak the truth by remaining silent or speak the truth in anger?

What do you think Paul meant by “the proper working of each individual part”?

What happens to the glory of God in spiritual communities when Christians do not see the big picture of what God is building and so their part isn't working properly?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Thank God for placing you in His Body.

Pray for your local body of Christians.

Ask God to make you a builder in His Body.

Ask the Holy Spirit to pour out the life of Christ through His people today.

Lesson 26

How are we to recognize that someone is a Christian?

Is it not that they love the brethren? Certainly this is one of the evidences that both Jesus and John emphasized.

Jesus also said it was those who actually obeyed His commands who were the genuine Christians.

Scripture Study: Read John 13:34 and John 17:22-23. (*10 minutes*)

What is Jesus' vision for His people?

What do you think is Jesus' idea for the practical expression of this oneness on the local level?

What is the role of unity in John 17:23?

Scripture Study: Read John 14:15, 21, and 23. (*5 minutes*)

What is the connection between obedience to Scripture and love for God?

How important is it for us as Christians to apply Scripture to our own attitudes and actions?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Wait upon the Lord this morning.

Be still and just realize that He is God Almighty and your Father.

Worship Him.

Pray for His people in your local fellowship.

Lesson 27

Christians are commanded to be of the same mind; yet Scripture recognizes that we will hold different views on some issues that are not central to the faith. What are we to think about this command to be of the same mind?

Paul tells those who are stronger in faith and who better understand what God is after to bear with those who are weaker in their understanding and faith; but the goal is to always be moving together toward agreement in the core issues. Unity is a heart thing.

Is this too high a goal? No, it is clearly stated in Scripture, and it will certainly be the standard of heaven. Let us honor the Lord by committing ourselves to His command.

Scripture Study: Read Romans 14:1 - 15:2. (*10 minutes*)

What types of things challenge your unity with the Christians in your fellowship?

What is Paul's message to you regarding these strains?

Scripture Study: Read 1 Corinthians 1:10-11. (*5 minutes*)

How seriously do you take these commands?

How do you think God wants you to handle the areas where you disagree with some of the Christians in your fellowship?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Ask the Lord if you need to forgive or to be reconciled to someone.

Cry out to God for His grace to bring His people into harmony.

Pray against the accuser of the brethren.

Ask the Holy Spirit to refresh your local body of Christians.

Lesson 28

Forgetting the important truths of God is a constant problem for us all. Scripture frequently exhorts us to, “remember.”

This is a good reason for us to carefully study God’s words on a daily basis as if our lives depended upon it, for certainly our welfare does depend upon our walking with Him through life.

This is also a good reason for us to need one another. We are to encourage, to remind, to exhort, and to provoke one another to love and good works. Christianity really is a “team sport.”

Scripture Study: Read Mark 8:16-21. (*10 minutes*)

Why did Jesus want them to remember what He had done before?

Like all education, the teacher builds upon the lessons of the past. What can you do to help yourself remember what God has taught you?

How can you help others remember as well as receive their help?

Scripture Study: While there are other verses which refer to our having forgotten something God has taught us, Hebrews 12:5-6 is perhaps the most poignant. (*5 minutes*)

What do you sense God might be saying to you in relation to your forgetting these important things?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Quietly contemplate the goodness of the Lord this morning.

Let His greatness influence you.

Pray His will into your circumstances.

Worship Him in His power and brilliance!

Lesson 29

What will be the significance of your life? What is that which is most important?

Is it not your obedience to God? And will that not come down to how you have loved?

While it is not always possible to stay in unity with someone who is not willing, it is always possible to love them and speak genuine blessings upon them.

Scripture Study: Read John 15:8-17. (*15 minutes*)

Looking at the whole passage, what do you think Jesus had in mind when He spoke of you proving to be His disciple?

How does Jesus say you are to abide in His love for you?

What is the connection between being Jesus' friend and loving the brethren?

In the overall context, what do you think Jesus meant when He referred to your bearing fruit?

Why does Jesus call you His friend?

What is the connection between loving others and joy?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Do you need forgiveness for not loving someone?

Commit yourself to love those who have disappointed you.

Come receive His love for you.

Pray for His love to be practically demonstrated among His people.

Lesson 30

The life of God flows through the unity of the brethren, whereas Satan constantly patrols our relationships seeking a weak spot, a place of insecurity or misunderstanding in order to divide.

Our determination to stay in unity displays the glory of God to the spirit realm. That this is even possible is due entirely to God.

It is every Christian's job to guard and prize the unity which has been won for us at the cost of Jesus dying on the cross. We live because of His victory!

Scripture Study: Read Ephesians 2:15-22 and Ephesians 3:10. (*5 minutes*)

How important was this unity that God created between the Jews and the Gentiles?

What do you think Paul meant by this term, "the manifold wisdom of God" which would so impact the "rulers and authorities in the heavenly places"?

Scripture Study: Read Ephesians 6:11-13. (*10 minutes*)

What are some of the "schemes of the devil"?

What do you think the devil wants to accomplish?

The "you" in Ephesians 6:13 is plural. What might be the significance of the plural here?

Prayer Time: (*15 – 30 minutes*)

Ask God to make you part of the glue for His people.

Praise Him for His wisdom and power in defeating the devil!
Commit yourself to live with Christ crucified.
Pray for God's glory to be demonstrated in His Church!