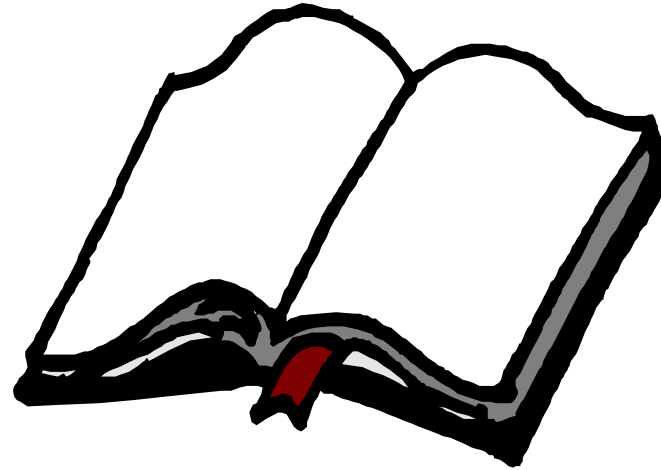


Look in the Book!



The "Look in the Book" series was designed to be printed on legal sized paper (8 1/2" x 14"). For better clarity, it should be printed front to back and folded as a brochure, beginning with page 2 (lesson 1 front).



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Stages of Spiritual Growth

Every new Christian goes through at least three stages on their way to spiritual development. Like a newborn baby thrust into a strange, unfamiliar world, a new child of God is first an **observer**. With wide eyes they examine their fresh surroundings. After growing comfortable with their new world, they launch out and become **followers** of those they respect. Unfortunately, many of God's children are content to remain at this level and stifle their growth, having only gone part of the way to the goal. A few brave souls, however, expect more from themselves and, *unlike* the steward who went out and buried his talent in the sand, they invest in the future. They become **leaders**.



"I don't go to church. I worship alone at home or while I walk in the woods." A member of a certain congregation offered this excuse for his long absence from the worship service. The minister, wanting to impress upon the man the importance of meeting together with all of God's family, decided to pay him a visit.

It was a cold winter evening. The minister found the man at home sitting before a blazing fire. Guessing the reason for the visit, the man invited the preacher in, led him to a chair by the fire and waited. The man of God snuggled in comfortably by the fire, but said nothing. As the silence hung thick over the room, the man squirmed in his chair, yet the preacher continued to silently watch the flames. Finally, after what seemed like hours, the minister reached over, took the tongs in hand and gently picked up a brightly burning ember. He placed the ember on the hearth away from the larger flame and again leaned back in silence.

Together the host and preacher watched the lone ember in quiet fascination. Slowly, the ember's flame diminished, there was a faint momentary glow, and then the fire was no more. Minutes later, the minister reached down, picked up the cold lifeless ember, and returned it to the fire. Immediately the ember began glowing again and the other flames seemed brighter as well. As the preacher stood to leave, the host commented, "Thank you so much for coming, and especially for that fiery sermon. I'll be at church next Sunday."

It is true that one can worship God anytime, anywhere. But, it is also true that God asks His children to gather col-

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lectively for worship. Like a loving mother expects all of her children to come to supper, God expects all of His children to come to worship. All mothers know that their children receive nourishment at times other than when they are collectively together. But all good mothers also know that there is a loving family dynamic that can only be achieved when all members of the family are in the same place. So goes the church. A spirit of worship is often achieved in places other than the collective service, but nothing can replace the loving family dynamic found only when the saints are together. Read Hebrews 10:24-25.

Besides regular church attendance, involvement also brings about many other positive side effects: Productivity is increased because “many hands make light work.” Unity is promoted because responsibility gives one a sense of belonging. Church stability results because the more involved a person gets, the less likely it is that that person will quit. But, perhaps most important of all, involvement opens the door to a personal expression of one’s faith. Someone once said rather conclusively, “Use it or lose it!” and perhaps nowhere can this truth be seen more vividly than in the work of the church. Like the bonding experience a family feels as it sits around the evening meal and excitedly shares the events of their day, the church family must promote the expression of faith experiences they

are having while walking with God. The failure to do so bottles up a dynamic so powerful that when it explodes, it has the potential of destroying both the person and the church.

Involvement is the key. Involvement allows spiritual excitement to be released as a positive force. We observe, we follow and then we are called to lead. None of these levels are bad if they are experienced temporarily. But, like a child who has its growth stunted by disease, failure to grow spiritually is counterproductive to God’s purpose.

A man was returning home from a long business trip when he ran into the worst fog conditions he had ever seen. Weary of his travels, he reluctantly continued on. As the fog thickened, he gripped the steering wheel even tighter and strained his eyes to make out the road ahead. In his mind he could imagine a terrible accident or someone standing in the middle of the road and he not being able to see them early enough to stop. Slowly, he continued on, afraid of what might lay ahead.

After what seemed like hours, he spotted the taillights of a car traveling ahead of him. Gradually, the man closed in on the vehicle and decided to follow its lights. Visions of a terrible accident still haunted him. Now he imagined several cars in the accident and numerous injured

bodies laying all over the highway. Then it happened! Suddenly, the red glow from the taillights ahead shot through the darkness and the vehicle came to an abrupt stop. Fear gripped the man’s heart. With horrible visions of an injured person laying in the road, he reluctantly exited his car and approached the other driver. “Why did you stop?!” asked the man with a trembling voice. Surprised at the question, the other man answered, “I stopped because I’m home. This is my garage!”

Anyone can follow. The problem with following is that you have little control over where you end up. God calls us to progress through all the stages of growth but not to linger too long as an observer or as a follower.

Where are you on the spiritual growth chart? How long have you been there? How hard are you working to reach the next level? In the coming lessons we will more closely examine observers, followers and then give special attention to the goal of becoming a leader.

Your spiritual growth is eternally important. Involvement is the key. I pray that God will use this study to help you turn that key and unlock the powerful expressions of faith found in you and in your congregation.

Look in the Book!

*Friends that study together,
spend eternity together!*

Read the scripture(s) and answer the questions below. Feel free to write your answers on another piece of paper and enclose it within this study guide.

Hebrews 5:12, 10:24-25

1. What signs of spiritual growth are provided in Hebrews 5:12?
2. Since it is possible for a person to worship God in private, why is it important to assemble with all the church?
3. What valuable lessons are learned as an observer and follower?
4. Why is it important that one not remain at these levels too long?
5. What makes a good leader?

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We Observe, Follow and Lead

Every new Christian goes through at least three stages on their way to spiritual development. Like a newborn baby thrust into a strange, unfamiliar world, a new child of God is first an **observer**. With wide eyes they examine their fresh surroundings. After growing comfortable with their new world, they launch out and become **followers** of those they respect. Unfortunately, many of God's children are content to remain at this level and stifle their growth, having only gone part of the way to the goal. A few brave souls, however, expect more from themselves and, *unlike* the steward who went out and buried his talent in the sand, they invest in the future. They become **leaders**.

1. We Observe

The story is told of an angry man who visited the office of a Georgia sheriff. "I've come to find out who owns the house I'm livin' in!" said the large outspoken man. "To whom do you pay rent?" asked the sheriff. "Ain't never paid none!" came the loud response. "How long have you been living there?" the officer continued. "Goin' on about nine years" said the man boldly. "Well then, what's the problem?" the sheriff wanted to know. "Well," said the freeloader, "the roof has started to leak, and if the landlord don't fix it quick, I'm gonna move!"

Many in the church are much like this freeloader. They passively sit by sucking up all of the spiritual freebies around them, yet never give anything back. They are often the ones who are quick to complain, anxious to criticize and fast about saying "I'm gonna move!" when things don't go their way. They often view church attendance like punching a heavenly time clock. They think of communion as spiri-

tual vitamins that, when taken regularly, relieve Christians of all other spiritual duties. Communion becomes a conscience pacifier that helps them feel free to exit out the back and rush off on vacation even before the rest of the service is completed. This type of selfish, passive observance cannot be pleasing to God. In fact, it turns His stomach and one day will cause Him to spew them out into eternal darkness. See Revelation 3:16.

Too many church members are like this freeloader. They are happy to suck up all the blessings around them, but when they are asked to get involved and to help maintain those blessings, they are quick to gripe and often move on to another church. God will not tolerate lukewarm freeloaders. Although it is not wrong to be an observer temporarily, to remain at this level is a sin.

2. We Follow

Under the Old Testament setting, Jewish men would bring their sacrifices to the tabernacle. Once inside, they would follow the lead of the priests as their sacrifices were presented to God. In the New Testament book of Romans 12:1, we find that all Christians are expected to follow Christ's example and present a sacrifice to God. "Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God - this is your spiritual act of worship."

An employer once told a lazy employee, "I am planning a salary increase for you." Excited by the possibility, the man asked, "When does the raise become effective?" "Just as soon as you do!" said his boss. "Just as soon as you do!"

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Somebody once said, "God doesn't just want to get the job done, He wants you to do it." The Corinthian church had a problem with stunted growth. Although they had grown to become more than just observers, their contentment to remain at the second level of followers caused prideful divisions. Paul rebukes this halfhearted approach to spiritual growth with the following words: "Brothers, I could not address you as spiritual but as worldly - mere infants in Christ. I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready." (1 Corinthians 3:1-2)

Although it is fine to allow others to temporarily lead you in spiritual growth, God desires that all should move beyond the level of a follower and up to the level of a leader.

3. We Lead

By Old Testament law, only a select group of men from the tribe of Levi were called priests and allowed to lead in the work of God. In the New Testament church, every Christian is a priest and expected to lead in some type of service to the Lord. Notice 1 Peter 2:9. "But you are a chosen people a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people, belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light."

In Matthew 28:18-20, Jesus called His followers to become leaders by discipling others with the principles He had commanded. "Then Jesus came to them and said, 'All authority in heaven and on earth had been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and 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.'"

Although the ways we lead may be different, the continuing need for leaders is the same. Too many Christians sit idly by expecting others to motivate them into action. Like a spoiled child sitting in a room surrounded by toys, many Christians have a severe lack of initiative.

One cold winter's day, while reclining in an easy chair, my wife lovingly presented me with a cup of hot chocolate. Grateful for this unsolicited gift, I thanked her and she returned to the kitchen. Later I picked up the cup for my first drink and noticed that the powdered mixture was still floating on top of the milk. In typical husband-like fashion, I tuned my voice to the most critical level and from my easy chair yelled into the kitchen, "Cindy! You didn't stir my hot chocolate!" Cindy is a quiet, meek individual and only on rare occasions does she raise her voice. The thought of me reclining lazily in that easy chair and then being critical of her free, unsolicited gift of love was too much. A brief moment of silence filled the room and then in her own quiet, but firm tone of voice she said, "Sonny, stir your own hot chocolate!"

Too many Christians recline in their "easy pews" each Sunday morning and complain because the songs are too slow, the prayers are too long or the sermon is not interesting. These members are followers who depend completely upon others for their motivations. When the external motivator fails, the quitting mentality often takes over. It is then that they begin to whine and threaten to leave if things do not change. My wife would tell such Christians, "Stir your own hot chocolate!"

The church desperately needs more members who can feed themselves. We need dreamers, movers, shakers, initiators. We need more God-motivated visionary leaders. The greater

number of members we can pull up to this level, the greater the level of effectiveness the church will experience.

An optimistic older gentleman once commented, "We ain't what we should be! We ain't what we could be! But thank God we ain't what we were!"

Every level of involvement is an important step toward the goal. Whether you are an observer, follower or leader, God expects only one thing from you - growth. Observers are expected to become followers, followers to become leaders and leaders to become more and more visionary.

Under the Old Testament law, only the High Priest could enter into the presence of God (Holy of Holies) and then he could only enter once each year. According to the book of Hebrews, Jesus is now our only High Priest. Today, He stands beside the throne of God, interceding for us on a continual basis.

Some day, God has promised that every Christian will be able to come into His presence. Until then, we have been given a vision of Heaven through scripture. It is this vision that inspires leaders and helps them "stir their own hot chocolate." What a glorious day it will be when that dream becomes a reality and access to the very throne room of God becomes ours. But no one can go there without going through the other levels of involvement.

God's presence is the goal. The levels of involvement are the ladder. God bless you in this study and in your climb to the top.

Look in the Book!

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Read the scripture(s) and answer the questions below. Feel free to write your answers on another piece of paper and enclose it within this study guide.

Revelation 3:16

Romans 12:1

1 Peter 2:9

1. Why is it important that everyone experience the level of an observer temporarily?
2. Why is it important that everyone experience the level of a follower temporarily?
3. How does one's vision of Heaven inspire effective leadership?
4. In what areas of the Lord's work are you equipped to lead?

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Lead in Personal Growth and Fellowship

To prepare God's people for the future, we must be vigilant about returning the church to her objectives. When these objectives are diligently focused upon and clearly communicated to God's people, the church will find itself involved in far less division because objectives reduce objections.

A favorite song of children includes the words, "I'm in right, out right, up right, down right, happy all the time..." As they sing, they point in the direction that the words indicate. The four motions of this song, in, out, up and down, embody the true objectives of a Christian. When these objectives are focused upon, they increase effectiveness and, as the song says, make Christians "happy all the time".

"In right"

One of the first objectives on which a new Christian must concentrate is to promote self-examination and personal individual growth. In Philippians 2:12, Paul instructs Christians to "...work out your salvation with fear and trembling", and in II Timothy 2:15 he says, "Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth."

One aspiring young writer stumbled across an old, dusty book in the back of a library. Curious about its contents, she checked it out, took it home and immediately began reading. Although she seldom left a book unfinished, about halfway through the evening, she could easily see that this book was not for her. The stories were stale and dry and she had a very difficult time keeping her mind on the subject. Disappointed and very bored, she laid the book aside only half finished.

A day or so later, the young writer met a man to whom she became very attracted. They began dating on a regular basis and it wasn't

long until they had fallen in love and began planning for a wedding. Several weeks before the big day, the woman discovered the library slip for that unbearably boring book she had attempted to read several months earlier. To her surprise, the author's last name was the same as her future husband's. "Honey!" she shouted, "You'll never guess what I've discovered! Several months ago I read the most uninteresting book ever written and the author has the same last name as yours. What a coincidence!" After revealing the title to him, she was shocked to hear her fiance' say, "Yes, I'm familiar with that book. I wrote it."

The next afternoon the young writer returned to the library, checked out the same boring book and took it home with her. That evening she sat down on her couch and began reading what earlier was a very stale, dry story. This time, however, the reading was remarkably different. She had no desire to stop halfway through. Her mind did not wander from the subject, and instead of the stories being just cold, black ink on a page, they became lines full of life and emotion.

What was it about the second reading that made it so strikingly different from the first? The book was the same and the message had not changed. Why was the book unbearably boring the first time, but overwhelmingly captivating the second time? The difference came not because the message had changed, but because she had fallen in love with the author. The Bible is often like that old, dusty book found in the back of the library. At first glance it may appear to be stale, cold and dry. But the problem is not with the material, the problem is in the heart of the reader. Fall in love with the Bible's author. Only then will the words be more than just black ink on a page. Only then will its lessons take on new life and its message move you with emotion.

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"Out right"

The second objective of a new Christian is to lead in reaching out to other family members. Galatians 6:10 says, "...as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, **especially to those who belong to the family of believers.**" This passage clearly makes the spiritual family a top priority.

Please notice the phrase "family of believers" in the passage above. There is a dynamic in the concept of the family that is unparalleled in all the world. A family provides security, comfort, discipline, unconditional love and many other qualities to its members. Repeatedly throughout scripture, God has used the family to illustrate spiritual relationships. God is called our Father and we His children. Christ is referred to as our elder brother and we his brothers and sisters. The family dynamic is essential to achieving the church's objective.

Perhaps the greatest distraction from the family atmosphere in the church today is our love affair with elaborate church buildings. They are cold, big and intimidating. They defeat the close personal home-like atmosphere that promotes the family dynamic. These too are a hold over from Catholic tradition. I hear God's people say that Christians are the temple of the Holy Spirit, yet I see them construct multi-million dollar buildings with stained glass windows and a crucifix behind the exalted pulpit just like in catholicism. I hear preachers quote Acts 7:48, "the Most High does not live in temples made with hands", yet I also hear statements like, "We have come into the house of God". I see churches split over eating in the "sanctuary". I watch as children from low-income families are shunned out of fear that they might smear the walls with their dirty little hands. I see all of this and it causes me to wonder, "Has the church lost its focus?"

Not long ago, I was questioned by a teenager after one of my sermons on baptism. She was a bright, dedicated Christian teen that had attended a restoration congregation all of her

life. In my lesson, I told about a friend who had studied with a hitch-hiker and baptized him in a river. Concerned that this man's baptism may not have been acceptable to God, she inquired, "I thought you had to be baptized in the church building."

This sad illustration shows a glimpse into the confusion we have instilled in the minds of our young and old members alike. May we never forget that it is not the structure that is holy. It is the atmosphere and the expressions of awe that brings us into the presence of God. Some of the most meaningful baptisms I have ever witnessed were in swimming pools, lakes or ponds. I have even helped baptize an elderly invalid in a large bathtub and a prison inmate in a hollow communion table. Did God think any less of these baptisms than He did of those in an "official" baptistry. I think not. Yet the way we speak of the building, guard it from being fully functional and invest in its worldly beauty, communicates to our members that it must have some holy priority.

Like all traditions, buildings are not wrong within themselves. The thing that makes buildings wrong is when they lose their expedience. The objective is to provide an atmosphere that draws members into a closer relationship with other family members.

Never once in all of the New Testament is there a command or example to meet in a special dedicated church building. On the other hand, numerous times within scripture we find the example of early Christians meeting in homes. (Acts 12:12; Romans 16:5; I Corinthians 16:19; Colossians 4:15; Philemon 2) To fully restore New Testament Christianity, the church would do well to re-examine its dependance and obsession with elaborate church buildings.

This of course raises the question, how do large assemblies of God's people come together? We know from Acts 5:12, 42 that the early church often met in the temple courts or Solomon's Colonnade, but this came about not

as an introduction of a holy location but as a convenience. The true dynamic of church growth seems to be shown as a combination of collective gatherings and small group assemblies. Notice Acts 5:42, "Day after day, **in the temple courts and from house to house**, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ." Notice Acts 2:46-47, "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."

The reason that the early church met in homes is quite obvious - a family functions best in small units. Consider the physical family. Large family reunions are great and they provide a unifying dynamic that cannot be replaced by any other setting. But, it is not at the large gatherings that individual needs and personal attention are best provided. It is at home in the smaller circle of family members that the real individual needs of each person gets met. Small groups facilitate personal attention. If the church ever wants to experience again the growth rate of the New Testament church, she needs to restore the New Testament approach.

For the future of the church to be bright and for restoration goals to be realized, the church must keep its focus on the objectives. Reaching out to other family members and building lasting relationships that will carry you through the toughest of times must become one of your primary goals. Early Christians used small group meetings in humble homes to reach this objective. We would do well to restore their approach in the work of God's church today. Take the lead in restoring New Testament fellowship.

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II Timothy 2:15
Galatians 6:10

1. After reading James 1:22-25, explain how the Bible aids in self-examination ("in right").
2. Make a list of all the relationships within the church that God uses family terms to define (example: we are all brothers and sisters).
3. In what ways are church buildings expedient and in what ways are they not?

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Lead in Reaching Toward God

A favorite song of children includes the words, "I'm in right, out right, up right, down right, happy all the time..." As they sing, they point in the direction that the words indicate. The four motions of this song, in, out, up and down, embody the true objectives of a Christian. In the last lesson, we examined the first two motions in and out. Now let's look at the next.

"Up right"

The third and most important objective of a new Christian is to reach up to God.

Worship is the term used in scripture to describe this reaching out toward God. In John 4:23 Jesus said, "... a time is coming and has now come when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks." Jesus here implies that there are true worshipers and there are false worshipers.

In Matthew 15:8 He describes the false worshipers, "These people honor me with their lips but their hearts are far from me." By the time Jesus' ministry began, Old Testament worship had been around for hundreds of years. During those centuries, numerous man-made laws had been attached to God's instructions and worship had become a ritualistic performance rather than a heart-felt experience. It is for this reason that Jesus continues to say, "They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men." (Matthew 15:9)

Today, many Christians have fallen into the same trap as the Old Testament Hebrews. Because of our selfish nature and spiritual immaturity we find it easier to let worship happen to us instead of us presenting it to God. It is often hard to approach God. It is always humbling. For this reason, we prefer meeting in large, cold buildings and sitting in rows facing the back of the heads of those in front of us. We prefer having a small handful of men climb into the exalted pulpit and manipulate our "worship performance". It is easier to show up once or twice a week, pay our spiritual dues by

enduring another lifeless service and then exit feeling we have paid off God. This keeps us emotionally uninvolved and helps us stream line all of our spiritual work into a one or two hour service.

In Exodus 20, God asked His people to come close to Mount Sinai so He could be near them. But, when they heard the trumpet and saw the thunder, lightning and the mountain in smoke, they feared the awesome presence of God. "Speak to us yourself" the people said to Moses, "but do not have God speak to us or we will die." (Exodus 20:19) Israel's fear of God was well warranted and in many ways it was healthy for the spiritual infancy in which they found themselves. But Israel lived under a much different setting and a completely different law. Today, God's people live under a new law. A law of grace, freedom and fearless access to almighty God. Paul said it this way in Romans 8:15-16, "For you did not receive a spirit that makes you a slave again to fear, but you received the Spirit of sonship. And by him we cry, 'Abba, Father'. The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God's children."

Because we fail to fully understand the true essence of our "sonship", our worship is often sterile and void of all emotional investment. We approach God in rituals and regimented "acts of worship" because we are uncomfortable getting too close to Him. Unlike a true son, we worry that we might accidentally do the wrong thing or say things the wrong way. And so, out of fear, we strangle our relationship to God with self-imposed limits and precise, technical performances. Like the ancient children of Israel, we elect men to approach God for us. They study for us, pray for us, serve us communion, preach to us and very often even sing at us, all because we do not want to get close to our Father. I can almost hear God weep from heaven, "Please, come close to me. Please feel my love. Experience my compassion. I want to be your Father." The Holy Spirit says in James 4:8, "Come near to God and he will come near to you", but our approach to worship often keeps God at arms length.

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Bible Study LITB006
Series Theme: Spiritual Growth

4

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Consider this illustration. Two men come home from work. Each man pulls into the driveway, gets out of the car, and walks to his front door. As the first man begins to open the door, he hears the whirl of a motor and the sound of wheels rolling down the hall. As he enters the house and looks down the hallway, he sees a computerized robot rolling across the floor to meet him. While hanging his coat in the closet, the robot bumps up against his leg and in a computerized voice it says, "I l-o-v-e-y-o-u-D-a-d-d-y."

As the second man comes to his front door, instead of hearing the whirl of a motor, he hears the pitter patter of little feet running down the hall. As he enters the house and looks down the hall, he sees his blue-eyed, blond-haired little girl running to greet him. With a big smile on her face, she jumps into his arms, squeezes him tight and says with a giggle, "I love you, Daddy!"

Which of these men do you think enjoyed their greeting the most? The one with a cold, computerized welcome or the man who was greeted with warm hugs and kisses? I'm sure you would agree that it was the man with the little girl, but what made the difference? There were many things, but perhaps the most important was the knowledge that his little girl made a choice to give him love. She could have run down the hall, kicked her father in the shins and said, "I hate you, Daddy!" but she did not. She chose to love him and that made a world of difference!

God is the same way. He created you with a mind of your own because He did not want a computerized program giving Him forced "love". Did you ever consider what a great compliment God paid us when He created us with the ability to choose? Think about it. You and I have the ability and freedom to choose God. That is what worship is all about.

Our English word worship comes from several Greek words that mean to kiss towards, to experience a feeling of awe or to render religious service or homage. (Vine's) The respected Greek scholar, W.E. Vine noted, "A consideration of the above verbs shows that it (worship) is not confined to praise; broadly it may be regarded as the direct acknowledgement to God, of His nature, attributes, ways and claims, whether by the outgoing of the heart in praise and

thanksgiving or by deed done in such acknowledgement." In other words, worship is an acknowledgement that comes from an attitude of awe.

One man put it this way, "Worship is what you do when you watch an awesome thunder storm, witness a dazzling sunset or see your newborn child for the first time. Your shoulders are tossed back, your hands are thrown wide, your lower jaw drops open and because words are so inadequate, the only sound you can utter toward heaven is 'awe!' That is worship!"

Since worship is not simply an event but rather an acknowledgement of an attitude, the church must make it a primary objective to foster an atmosphere that promotes the expressions of "awe!"

Some time ago I was approached by a discouraged young Christian. He had just returned from a church camp of junior high children. He explained to me that during this week, the youngsters were discouraged from singing "devotional songs" during worship service. In the director's mind, they lacked spiritual substance. Each evening, the children were assembled for services and songs were sung out of the traditionally correct hymnals. It was also decided by the authorities that be, that the children needed a better understanding of the book of Revelation. And so, each evening a dry monotone preacher spoke for over an hour on this subject. When the children lost interest, they were reprimanded. Toward the middle of the week, the children became so bored and discouraged with the adult's definition of worship that when they failed to pay attention to the sermon, their swimming privileges were taken away.

Sadly, this tragedy does not just happen at church camp. It happens every week in assemblies all around the world and perhaps in the services that you attend. The sad story above illustrates far too well what we have done to our young people and to their desire for worship.

Did you know that some studies show that over 40% of high school seniors leave God after graduation. Did you know that the suicide rate in America has nearly quadrupled in the last 30 years. What is discouraging our young? Why do they struggle to reach spiritual commitment and find a faith that will give them hope in the darkest hour? Could it be that our worship services have ritualistically bored them to death spiritually and

have convinced them that God is too high and His presence too holy for them to come close to Him?

If it is the church's responsibility to produce an atmosphere that promotes experiences of "awe!", then **every** Christian deserves to be helped in reaching this worshipful attitude. Worship services must reach out to all levels of spiritual maturity. My grandmother used to reach "awe!" by singing "The Old Rugged Cross". For me the devotional song "Seek Ye First" draws me into the presence of God. For children it may be "Jesus Loves Me" or "The Wise Man Built His House Upon A Rock". But whatever the age and whomever the person, we all deserve to be allowed to do those things which, according to God's plan, draws us into the attitude of "awe!"

Traditional songs, repetitious orders of worship, old English jargon, monotone sermons and a host of other man-made limits to true worship have literally murdered our children's desire to approach God. For too many of them, "Awe!" comes not as a response to God's awesome nature but as an exhale at the end of another yawn. At nearly every meeting that I conduct, I am approached by a mother who is in tears over her child's decision to leave the church. Some day we will answer for those who we have pushed away. Like a bad steward of heavenly gifts, God will require an answer for our mismanagement.

For restoration objectives to be achieved, every generation must restore the true New Testament atmosphere of worship. Take the lead in drawing others into the presence of our awesome God.

Look in the Book!

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Read the scripture(s) and answer the questions below. Feel free to write your answers on another piece of paper and enclose it within this study guide.

John 4:23

Matthew 15:8

1. In what way are the words "spirit and truth" describing different elements of true worship?
2. Make a list of five things that help bring you to "awe".
3. Why is God so interested in our heart?
4. What are five things the church needs to change to better promote "awe" among its members?

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Lead in Friendship Evangelism

Consider the three following keys to friendship evangelism:

1. Get Ready - To prepare ourselves for evangelism, we must first empty our hearts of all self-ish desires and fill ourselves with the love of Jesus. Notice the following passages:

"For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks."
(Matthew 12:34)

"For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."
(Matthew 6:21)

"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me."
(Galatians 2:20)

If our hearts are filled with Jesus, our lives will be a walking billboard advertising His love.

"I want a divorce!" the woman sobbed. After months of coming to therapy by herself, a woman finally decided to end the marriage. Just to get back at her neglectful husband, the marriage counselor suggested that she take a few weeks and make him feel like he was living in Heaven on earth. Then, after he was sufficiently spoiled, she was to pull the rug out from under him by announcing her decision to get a divorce. He would be devastated and she would have her revenge. Hurt, and wanting to get even, the woman agreed to the plan.

That night the woman prepared her husband's favorite meal. When he arrived home from work, she greeted him at the door with the newspaper, led him over to his recliner, removed his shoes



and put his slippers on his feet. "Just sit back and relax," she suggested. "Supper will be ready in just a few minutes." The husband was puzzled, but being the masculine silent type, he just sat back and soaked it up without saying a word.

For a solid week, the woman waited on her husband hand and foot, treating him like a king in his own castle. Then one day something startling happened. The doorbell rang and when the woman answered it, she was shocked to see a delivery man with a bouquet of roses in his hand. The card simply read, "Your Husband". The next day, following supper, the husband actually cleared the table and then told his wife to go relax while he washed the dishes. The following morning, the woman found a heart-shaped card taped to the bathroom mirror containing a \$50 bill and a message which read, "Buy something special, you deserve it! P.S. I love you."

Several months passed and one day the woman bumped into the marriage counselor at the mall. "Why didn't you return to work after your divorce?" the man asked. After explaining the unexpected results of their scheme for revenge, the woman finished, "We've never been more in love! I treat him like a king and he treats me like a queen. We'll never get a divorce as long as this keeps up!"

The key to the happy ending in the story above is that by dying to their own selfish desires and allowing their partner's desires to reign in their heart, the couple found unity in serving each other. Jesus served us by leaving the throne room of Heaven to come to Earth and die on an old rugged cross. Will we return His love by dying to our selfish desires so that Christ can live in us? (Galatians 2:20 - quoted earlier)

Some say, "I don't have the ability to evangelize!" "Yeah, you do!" is my response. Give that

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- LITB006.2 - Observe, Follow and Lead
- LITB006.3 - Lead, Part 1
- LITB006.4 - Lead, Part 2
- LITB006.5 - Lead, Part 3



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Sonny Childs is a full-time author and traveling evangelist. He often speaks on these and other topics. Call the number above for more information.

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I'm A Christian, Now What?



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same person a brand new grandbaby and they will evangelize the entire community with how precious that little child is to them. They will show pictures to total strangers and preach the child's value to everyone they meet.

Our failure to evangelize is not because we lack ability, it is because we lack inspiration. When we truly fill our hearts with Christ and are overwhelmed by the power of His great love, evangelism will be as natural as talking about the ones that we love.

Get ready. Fill your heart with Jesus.

2. Get Relaxed - When the world looks into the heart of a Christian, they expect to find something different from the cold, angry, stress-filled conditions of the world. Jesus said in John 13 that by having a different condition of the heart, we would prove to the world that we were disciples of Christ. Thus, the opposite must also be true. If the church offers nothing more than another place to find stress, unrest and insincerity, the world will conclude we are not Christ's disciples and look elsewhere for relief.

Notice the words of Jesus. "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another." (John 13:34-35)

Peace, self-control and love are three of the most important tools of evangelism. A well-trained diathalon contestant can ski for miles in the blistering snow and then pause to shoot a target dead center from many yards away. I'm told that one of the most valuable parts of diathalon training is learning to bring one's body under control by relaxation. Some diathalon athletes actually learn to relax so deeply that they are trained to squeeze the trigger in between heart beats.

Christians could learn a lot from the diathalon. We are often too impatient to be effective. We know that worldly individuals get upset while standing in a slow checkout line or following behind a slow driver. But, far too often, Christians are not very different in their approach to

life. We blow our horns, growl at the cashier and rush through life just like the rest of the world. Where is the difference?

Atheists love others just like Christians do. What then sets us apart? It's not just love that should make a Christian different, it's learning to love under pressure. Christians who are truly effective at sharing their faith are the ones who have learned to relax. They offer the world a life-style filled with peace, confidence and love under pressure. One need not memorize unnatural techniques to be a soul winners. Simply lean back in the arms of Christ, enjoy life and let others see the benefits.

Get relaxed. Fill your heart with Jesus.

3. Get Real - In Acts 9:15, God calls Saul His "chosen instrument". Notice the verse: "But the Lord said to Ananias, 'Go! This man is my chosen instrument to carry my name before the Gentiles and their kinds and before the people of Israel.'" Every effective soul winner understands that they are simply an instrument in hands of God. It is not up to us to save the world. It is up to us to let God use us while He saves the world.

As one who frequently attends soul winning workshops, I have experienced more than most the guilt of not living up to the speaker's lofty challenges. I once heard a speaker say that if a Christian were seated next to a stranger on a plane and did not speak to them about their soul, they should find that person and apologize. I remember hearing another speaker tell of how he met a lady in the grocery store and before getting to the checkout line he had convinced her to be baptized. On and on the stories were told and tighter and tighter the guilt would grip my heart. Because of that guilt, I would often force myself to make unnatural attempts at soul winning and over and over again doors were slammed in my face and a frustrated discouragement was the only result.

It was at this time in my ministry that I heard some fantastic lessons on making evangelism natural. I was told that not everyone approaches people in the same ways and that God did not expect me to attack people with a "sales pitch." I was reassured to find out that I was just God's tool and that, if I

would let Him use me, He would guide me into situations where I too could be effective.

During the search for my evangelistic identity, I came to view II Corinthians 12:9-10 in a different light. "But he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong." Always before I had been drawn to the superficial parts of this passage - Paul had a problem, he prayed three times for it to be removed and God said, "No." But then I started looking deeper into this passage and examining God's reason for saying no to Paul's request. Here was one of the most prolific soul winners in all of history, yet he was also struggling with effectiveness. "If only God would remove this distraction from my life," Paul must have thought to himself. "Maybe then I could reach more people." In prayer after prayer Paul asked God to remove this thorn. Then it occurred to him, "When I am weak, then I am strong." Like a lifeline to an astronaut, the "thorn in the flesh" kept Paul connected to the real source of his strength. Without it, he may have become self-confident and may have attempted to move forward without God.

To one degree or another, we all have thorns in the flesh. Some of them are there by our own design and need to be removed for us to be effective. Others are there by God's design and need to be honored as His way of keeping us close. Whatever your hangup or thorn in the flesh, get real with God. Share with Him your desire to be an important tool in His work to save the world. Ask Him to remove the thorns that are there because of selfishness, but to keep the ones that are there in order to protect you from yourself.

Get real. Fill your heart with Jesus.

Remember, evangelism is not so much what you do but who you are. Get ready. Get relaxed. Get real. Let soul winning be a natural expression of your relationship with Christ. Evangelism is a life-style. Are you living it?

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Matthew 12:34

John 13:34-35

II Corinthians 12:9-10

1. Why is it easier to talk about things you love? How does this relate to evangelism?
2. Why must you be at peace within yourself before you can be evangelistically effective? How do you maintain such a peace?
3. How is it possible to be strong when you are weak?

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