



Unit 4: Disciple of Christ

Live life as a disciple of Christ and intentionally make disciples for the glory of God.

Lesson 10 Holy Power

Day One ***God is Holy***

We learned in *Lesson 9, Worship in Christ*, that worship involves our complete dependence or submission to God and His Son. The Holy Spirit draws us to the Lord and enables us to live through Him. It is a lifetime commitment of surrender and worship.

Read Colossians 2:6–7 and answer questions 1–8:

*So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him,
7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.* Colossians 2:6–7

1. How are disciples of Christ supposed to continue to live their lives?
2. As a disciple of Christ, how are you rooted and built up in Christ Jesus?

Disciples receive Christ as their Savior and continue living in union with Him. The union is so deep that the apostle Paul uses the symbolism of believers being rooted in the ground with Jesus like a tree rooted in good soil. Nourished by the Lord Jesus, we are strengthened in our faith and are overflowing with thankfulness.

This lesson is about holy power from a holy God. Recall we studied God's holiness in Unit 1: *Who Is God?*, Lesson 5, *God Is Holy*. We also looked at *The Leader's Fire of Holiness* in Unit 3: *Christian Leadership*, Lesson 6. While there may be some overlap in this lesson regarding holiness, the dimension of God working powerfully through disciples is fresh and transformative.

Holiness means that God is set apart on His heavenly throne and set apart from sin. He casts a vision of divine brilliance and majesty. He is pure, perfect, and exalted above all.

The fact that God is holy and pure leads us to praise and worship Him. We are thankful that God has no hint of sin or wrongdoing. He is faultless and morally perfect in every way.

3. How would it affect your trust in God if He did not mind telling a few “white” lies or bending the truth sometimes?

4. Would you cherish falling down and worshiping God if He were selfish, cynical, or bitter?
Yes No (Underline One)

God is truthful, perfectly good, merciful, and compassionate. He is gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness. Therefore we can trust God and rest in His Word.

Definition: *Holiness* is a divine attribute of God. It means He is set apart from all that is impure or morally wrong. He is perfect and deserves adoration and reverence. *Holiness* is also used to describe persons, places, and things which have been set apart by God and used for His purposes.

5. Read 1 John 1:5. Why should the fact that God is light (pure, holy) and in Him there is no darkness (sin), cause your mouth to open in praise and thanksgiving?

This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 1 John 1:5

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #1–5 with your discipleship team.

God is the builder of everything (Hebrews 3:4). He designed and created the world from His holy power. It is an excellent system created from God’s perfect nature, authority, and omnipotence. Satan infiltrated (entered) the good earth and darkened it.

Without God, no love or goodness exists. You may have heard a nonbeliever joke that he would rather go to hell with his friends than be in the company of the righteous in heaven. Or perhaps he is not joking and really believes that hell will be a more enjoyable place than heaven. Nothing could be farther from the truth.

Hell is separation from God—it will be totally void of any goodness or comfort. Therefore a sinner will not have any friends, only enemies. Friendship will not exist. Laughter will not exist. Not a moment’s peace will be possible.

Anyone who goes against God and His system or holy world structure is a sinner. This person brings damage and chaos into a good and ordered design. God does not want this unholy person in His heaven or in His presence. God went to great lengths to help us understand His holiness. We need to understand that He is sacred. He alone is worthy of worship, praise, and veneration.

6. Suppose you owned a successful business. It provided a useful service for customers and jobs for many employees. Customers were happy and so were the employees who earned a good wage. You had designed your business to be a good and peaceful place to work. You set up rules to ensure the workplace would remain that way. One day, you discovered that one of your

employees was breaking the rules, stealing from the business, harassing (troubling) other workers, and speaking badly about you and others. What would you do?

We break many of God's rules every day. Our sinful thoughts, words, and actions disrupt God's ideal workplace. God's rules can be thought of as His will revealed to us both in the Old and New Testaments.

The first five books of the Old Testament or Pentateuch contain the Law (rules, commandments, judgments, decrees, or customs) that God gave Moses for the Israelites. You may be familiar with the Hebrew word *torah* that is regularly translated law in the Old Testament. The Israelites were to obey and follow God's law (*torah*) because He had freed them from slavery and led them out of Egypt.

"Later development in Israel's history gave an expanded meaning to *torah*. By New Testament times *torah* meant not only the Old Testament Scriptures (the written Law), but also the oral law (unwritten law) of Israel as well. The religious leaders developed [the oral law] in applying the written Law to new life situations. This oral law is sometimes referred to as 'the tradition of the elders' in the New Testament (compare Matthew 15:2; Mark 7:5; Galatians 1:14)."¹

Read Deuteronomy 11:26–28 and answer questions 7–10:

See, I am setting before you today a blessing and a curse—²⁷ the blessing if you obey the commands of the LORD your God that I am giving you today; ²⁸ the curse if you disobey the commands of the LORD your God and turn from the way that I command you today by following other gods, which you have not known. Deuteronomy 11:26–28

7. What did God say would happen if the Israelites obeyed His commands (v. 27)?

8. How would you define a blessing (v. 27)?

God's blessing on humankind begins with His felt presence. A blessing from God means that He is close and has not withdrawn His attention and power. God is near to us when He meets our physical and emotional needs causing us to experience His goodness and power.

As a believer and disciple of Christ, we are assured of God's continual blessing as His Spirit lives within us. We have faith, no matter the circumstances, because God is with us. Scripture tells us God works out all things for our good, molding us into the image of His Son (Romans 8:28–29). Becoming like Jesus truly makes one's life blessed!

9. What did God say would happen if the Israelites disobeyed His commands (v. 28)?

¹ Trent C. Butler, editor, *Holman Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 1991), 866.

10. How would you define a curse (v. 28)?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #6–10 with your discipleship team.

When God pronounces a curse, it is a condemnation of sin. God is judging sin. Our sins are a direct assault on God's holiness. If we do not grasp the importance of God's holiness we might miss the gravity of wrongful actions and why the Christian life is devoid of supernatural power. Understanding God's holiness reveals why Jesus had to die for our sins and the incredible beauty of being in Christ.

Read Leviticus, chapters 17–26 and answer questions 11–14:

For the life of a creature is in the blood, and I have given it to you to make atonement for yourselves on the altar; it is the blood that makes atonement for one's life. Leviticus 17:11
(Atonement is the reconciliation, or the bringing together of God and humanity)

11. Why do you think biblical scholars have named these chapters the holiness codes?

12. Choose and list the key verse in these chapters that summarize the main thought.

13. What did God say or impress upon you as you were reading the holiness codes?

14. Whose blood made atonement for your life and makes you holy?

Action Step

15. Meditate on Leviticus 17:11 and memorize it.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers to #11–14 and your memory verse #15 with your discipleship team.

—End Day One—

Day Two
Holy Power

Jesus made atonement for our sins. As a result, believers are free from spiritual blindness, the law, sin, and death. Believers are also free to obey and serve Christ in the power of His Spirit.

Read 2 Corinthians 3:17 and answer questions 16–18:

Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom.

2 Corinthians 3:17 (See John 17:20–21; 1 Corinthians 12:4–6)

16. The Lord Jesus is the Spirit and God the Father is the Spirit. True False (Underline One)

17. When you, a believer, are filled with the Holy Spirit, who indwells you?

18. Explain the freedom the Spirit of the Lord brings (See 2 Corinthians 3:9–18).

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #16–18 with your discipleship team.

Believers are host to a holy God with holy expectations. God expects us to obey His Word and rid ourselves of all unholy, worldly pursuits. Remember, God’s Spirit is the *Holy* Spirit. The Spirit can work through believers in powerful and world-changing ways, but it comes at a cost.

A.W. Tozer writes in his book, *The Divine Conquest*:

Are you sure you want to be filled with a Spirit who, though he is like Jesus in his gentleness and love, will nevertheless demand to be Lord of your life. Are you willing to let your personality be taken over by another, even if that other be the Spirit of God himself? If the Spirit takes charge of your life, he will expect unquestioning obedience in everything. He will not tolerate in you the self-sins even though they are permitted and excused by most Christians. By the self-sins I mean self-love, self-pity, self-seeking, self-confidence, self-righteousness, self-aggrandizement, self-defense. You will find the Spirit to be in sharp opposition in the easy ways of the world and of the mixed multitude within the precincts of religion.²

He may strip you of many of those borderline pleasures that other Christians enjoy but which are to you a source of refined evil. Through it all he will enfold you in a love so vast, so mighty, so all-embracing, so wondrous that your very losses will seem like gains and your small pains like pleasures. Yet the flesh will whimper under his yoke and cry out against it as a burden too great to bear. And you will be permitted to enjoy the solemn privilege of suffering to fill up in your flesh ‘what is

² A.W. Tozer, *The Divine Conquest* (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 1950), 145.

still lacking in regard to Christ's afflictions, for the sake of his body, which is the church.'³

Before we can be filled with the Spirit, the desire to be filled must be all-consuming. It must be for the time the biggest thing in life, so acute, so intrusive as to crowd out everything else. The degree of fullness in any life accords perfectly with the intensity of true desire. We have as much of God as we actually want. One great hindrance to the Spirit-filled life is the theology of complacency so widely accepted among gospel Christians today. According to this view, acute desire is evidence of unbelief and proof of lack of knowledge of Scripture. A sufficient refutation of this position is afforded by the Word of God itself and by the fact that it always fails to produce real saintliness among those who hold it.⁴

Believers, be cautious when you feel comfortable and satisfied in your faith. This is a dangerous time when you can stumble into sin. When we are not walking forward in our faith, we will not stand still for long. Inevitably, we will move backward.

19. Read Revelation 3:16. How does this verse speak to Jesus' feelings toward complacency?

So, because you are lukewarm—neither hot nor cold—I am about to spit you out of my mouth.
Revelation 3:16

Spirit-filled disciples rely on the power of the Spirit to follow God's commands, foster a relationship with Him, and fulfill His purposes. The Spirit's power is identical with God's power and Christ's power. God's grace and strength are directed to believers through His Spirit.

Definition: *Power* is defined in three ways. *First*, it is the ability or capacity to do something or act in a particular way; *second*, it means to direct or influence the behavior of others or events; and *third*, *power* is the ability to exert physical strength or force by something or someone.

The Greek word *dunamis* (δύναμις) is translated *power* in most English translations. In addition to meaning *power*, it also means strength; miracle, miracle worker, supernatural power(s), the *power* of God; ability, capacity, means, and significance.

Holy power comes from God and it is used for His purposes. Holy power is supernatural. When we are given the ability or capacity to do something, we should always reflect its source back to God. Even if the ability seems small or insignificant, it is not for our self-satisfaction or honor, but for the glory of God.

In the same way, we do not receive influence or physical strength for people's admiration, love or fear. We can even take this principle further and say that our natural talents, personality, or physical attributes are not given to us for approval, respect, or popularity. They are to be used for

³ Ibid., 146.

⁴ Ibid., 146–147.

God's plans and His glory. In addition, we should thank God every day for the abilities, talents, and physical traits that He has given to us.

In the prophetic book of Revelation, seven angels praise God through the song of Moses and the Lamb. They give credit to God for His great and marvelous deeds. The song reminds us that God is holy and to be glorified. All nations *will* come and worship the Lord God Almighty.

Action Step

20. Read Revelation 15:3–4. Join God's holy angels in praising Him through this song and write out one sentence of praise.

... and sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb: "Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the nations. ⁴ Who will not fear you, Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you, for your righteous acts have been revealed." Revelation 15:3–4

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #19–20 with your discipleship team.

Read Luke 1:35 and answer questions 21–23:

The angel answered, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you [Mary], and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God." Luke 1:35

Definition: The Greek word *episkiasei* (ἐπισκιάσει) is translated *overshadow* in Luke 1:35 above. Literally, it means to cast a shadow by partially blocking out a source of light. Figuratively, *episkiasei* is defined as the effective presence of God; in imagery of divine power.

21. To whom is the angel Gabriel talking?

22. How was Jesus, the Son of God, conceived in Mary's womb?

23. Why do you think Gabriel referred to Jesus as the holy one?

Read Acts 10:38 and answer questions 24–27:

... how God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. Acts 10:38 (Anoint in this context is God setting Jesus apart for special service.)

24. How did God anoint Jesus?

25. What did Jesus do after He received God's anointing with the Holy Spirit and power?

26. Was God with Jesus? Yes No (Underline One)

27. Who is with *you* and what will *you* do with your anointing of the Holy Spirit and power (Reference: Acts 1:5, 8; 2 Corinthians 1:20–22)?

Read Ephesians 3:16–19 and answer questions 28–32:

I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, ¹⁷ so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Ephesians 3:16–19

28. The apostle Paul is praying for the saints at Ephesus. How does he ask God the Father to strengthen them (v. 16)?

29. What is the reason Paul is praying for the Ephesians to be strengthened with power through God's Spirit in their inner being (mind and will) (v. 17)?

30. What does Paul pray in vv. 18–19?

31. How is Ephesians 3:16–19 an effective prayer for holy power?

Action Step

32. Pray Ephesians 3:16–19 for the members of your discipleship team for one week.
I have prayed Ephesians 3:16–19 for the disciples on my team each day for seven days.
Yes No (Underline One)

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #23–32 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Two—

Day Three

Power in Weakness

An integral part of holiness is being set apart to do what God desires. The Word tells us a lot about God's desires—His will and plans. It also gives us examples of saints who followed God even under strange and difficult circumstances.

Definition: Both the Old and New Testaments contain five main uses of the word *call*: invitation, summons, commission, or naming. In the following paragraphs, we are using the word *call* or *calling* in the sense of commission or service (Acts 13:2). God issues a divine *call* to individuals for special work or office. The emphasis is on God's initiative and grace.

God has a calling on our lives. It may involve a profession, talent, gift, or mission. God's calling is usually accompanied with a strong inner impression or impulse toward the activity.

Believers are gifted and called in unique ways. I was called to provide Christian materials and discipleship studies to men and women in prison. It started simply by God using Christian books in my own walk⁵ with Him. Then God planted the desire in my heart to help others know and follow Jesus more closely through these materials.

In 1996, the Lord led me to start or found CLI with a hundred books at a Raleigh YMCA. Step by step, or by increments, God moved the ministry along to where it is today. You might call this an "incremental calling." As we obeyed and followed God in the small things, He increased and expanded our work.

In 2002 we began sending Christian books to prison chaplains to distribute to the imprisoned. Because we stamped each book with our address, we received letters from those impacted by the truth written in the books. Then we added our correspondence Bible studies and changed our name to Prison Alliance.

By the time my husband and I retired in 2021, Prison Alliance was an international prison ministry affecting many lives. In this case, God's holy power was slowly working through Prison Alliance to save, restore, and build up His kingdom. We could see it daily with letters and completed Bible studies testifying to the transforming power of Jesus Christ.

God provided every resource we needed to ship and mail to the incarcerated in thousands of prisons. He continually amazed us by moving people and publishers to donate millions of books, Bibles, and funds over the years. God loves the imprisoned and wants them to repent and follow Christ. He made that abundantly clear with the remarkable fruit of Prison Alliance.

Still, we had our challenges. There were moments when I was overwhelmed with the sheer volume of work, staffing problems, and a self-directed, rather than a God-directed board of

⁵ Walk is used figuratively in the Bible to indicate one's conduct or way of life. To walk with God is to be obedient, acceptable in His sight, and conformed to His will (Genesis 5:24). Believers walk with God through the grace of Christ Jesus. To walk by the Spirit is to accept and welcome the guidance and leadership of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 5:16).

directors. At those times, I felt weak and unprepared for the task. But God was still all powerful and His plan would not be thwarted—for Prison Alliance or for me.

I had mentioned in a previous lesson that after retiring from Prison Alliance, Anders and I founded In Jesus Steps, a discipleship ministry. We are again seeking God's will and His holy power to transform lives for His glory. The following is an example of one of our IJS disciples learning and experiencing God's power through her weakness.

After being on her IJS discipleship team for a couple of months, Dianne's team started studying and talking about sharing the gospel. Not only did she have the normal fear of witnessing, but because of neurological issues, Dianne has difficulty communicating smoothly.

Dianne said to her coach:

I do not . . . see . . . how! I don't know . . . [I can] just say, Hi.

Her coach thought:

I get scared sometimes too, but I really don't see how she will witness either! But I do want her to learn to trust You, God. Immediately I knew that this was a test for me as well as for her.

Dianne's coach responded:

Let's ask God to help you. He can put His words in your mouth, give you boldness, and the ability to speak to them. Let's pray now and continue to pray.

The next week when her team met, Dianne exclaimed:

I . . . I DID IT!!! I did what . . . what . . . this lesson . . . telling us . . . [to] do!

In store . . . [I was] going shopping . . . young employee helped me.

I asked, 'Are . . . you Christian?' She said, 'Yes!' I am so happy! God helped me!

The week after that, Dianne told her team how she asked her neighbor if she knew Jesus, which opened up a new dimension in their relationship. Not only was Dianne emboldened and praised God, but her coach was strengthened in her faith also.

Hardships and struggles vary among individuals based on our calling, circumstances, and experiences. Just like we are unique in our appearance and personalities, we are unique in our trials. Some believers face such ordeals, we wonder how they endure. While others escape such trauma. Understand this fact, but do not compare your troubles with others.

The key is focusing on God's grace—it is sufficient. God's holy power is made perfect in weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9–10). Thus, when we are weak, we are strong.

Read 2 Corinthians 4:7–10 and answer questions 33–38:

For God, who said, “Let light shine out of darkness,” made his light shine in our hearts to give us the light of the knowledge of God’s glory displayed in the face of Christ.⁷ But we have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us.⁸ We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair;⁹ persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed.¹⁰ We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body.¹¹ For we who are alive are always being given over to death for Jesus’ sake, so that his life may also be revealed in our mortal body. 2 Corinthians 4:7–10

Definition: Pottery is defined as pots, jars, dishes, and other articles made of earthenware or baked clay. A *jar of clay* was a piece of pottery that was used to hold water, flour, etc. In biblical times, treasures or valuables might be hidden in a *clay jar* because of its simplicity, it did not attract attention. Eastern kings also had the practice of storing their gold and silver in *clay jars*. Paul uses the term *jars of clay* figuratively in 2 Corinthians 4:7 above to represent his own, and also humanity’s frail, feeble, and perishing bodies.

33. In creation, God spoke light into existence. How does God make His light shine in believer’s hearts so that we know Him (v. 6)?

34. What is the treasure that is in jars of clay and why do believers have it (vv. 6–7)?

35. Why does Paul refer to himself and other people as jars of clay (v. 7)?

36. Can you share a time, either now or in the past, when you felt like Paul, hard pressed on every side (v. 8)?

37. Paul was not crushed, not in despair, not abandoned, and not destroyed (v. 8). Regarding your answer to #36, how did you, are how will you overcome your hardships?

38. What does it mean to *carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body* ? (vv. 10–11).

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #33–38 with your discipleship team.

Paul’s account of carrying around in his body the death of Christ aligns with Jesus’ teaching. In the parables of the hidden treasure and the pearl, Jesus imparted the lesson that the kingdom of

God holds immeasurable value, so much so that one should be prepared to relinquish everything to attain it (Matthew 13:44–46). The treasure, synonymous with the kingdom of God and the gospel, is of such significance that it surpasses any hardships or persecutions faced in pursuit of obtaining and spreading it to others.

Here lies the paradox of the gospel—those who forfeit their lives will discover true life. Jesus also conveyed that those who do not shoulder their cross and follow Him are unworthy of Him (Matthew 10:37–38). Paul embraces his cross by bearing the death of Jesus in his body. That is, because of his afflictions, he walks around like a corpse. Yet, it is precisely through Paul and his companions' surrendering of self that they receive the resurrection power of Jesus Christ.

The holy power of the Father, the Son, and the Spirit works through human frailty. God's strength is perfected in our weakness (2 Corinthians 12:9). Therefore, we ought to embrace our suffering as akin to Christ's, seeking His resurrection power to glorify God and inspire belief in the living Christ.

Embracing suffering is not easy which is why we need to rely on God's grace. Even the smallest challenges can sometimes seem daunting. However, despite life's hardships, we can be certain of receiving His grace to excel in every good work. While God is working on our inner lives, He is also working through us, enabling others to see, praise, and emulate Christ.

Weakness and suffering should prevent disciples from becoming prideful when God reveals His holy power through them. There is a tendency for individuals to attribute the remarkable things God accomplishes in and around their lives to themselves—an issue rooted in pride. So, when God works through our frailty, we must acknowledge the origin of this power and glorify God.

The principle of God's holy power is the same today as it was in ancient times. The book of Esther is an example of God working through suffering and human frailty. In this case, God was working mightily to save His people from annihilation.

About 460 B.C., Esther was chosen by King Xerxes of Persia to be his queen. Almost like a fairy tale, an edict had gone out for the king's commissioners to go into his provinces to gather all the beautiful maidens to be presented to him. He would then choose one of these virgins to be his wife. They were taken to the palace where they were given beauty treatments for twelve months.

Esther was descended from the Jewish people exiled (banished, sent away) from Judah at the end of the 6th century B.C. God had used Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, to scatter the Jews for their unfaithfulness. Still, God kept a remnant who were loyal to Him even though they moved to a new country with a different language and customs. They did not forget God.

Definition: *Remnant* is defined as a remainder or something left over. The biblical definition for *remnant* refers to the righteous people of God remaining after divine judgment.

Esther's cousin, Mordecai, had taken her as his own daughter after her parents had died. Although he could do nothing to stop the king's commissioner from taking Esther, he was

concerned for her welfare. He told her not to reveal her Jewish heritage and she willingly followed his instruction.

At the king's palace, Esther won the favor of all who saw her. When she finally met King Xerxes, she won His favor also. He was very attracted to her and set a royal crown on her head.

However, the Jews had an enemy named Haman who was close to the king. When Mordecai would not kneel before Haman and pay him honor, he was enraged. Haman lied to the king and told him the Jews did not obey the laws and therefore they should be destroyed. He manipulated the king into sending out orders that all the Jews were to be killed on a single day, the thirteenth day of the twelfth month.

While the Jews were in great mourning over this tragic turn of events, Mordecai sent a message to Esther explaining what had happened. He urged her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people. She sent a message back to Mordecai stating the fact that anyone, including the Queen, who approached the king without being summoned would be put to death. The only exception for that life to be spared would be for the king to extend his gold scepter.

Read Esther 4:12–14 and answer questions 39–43:

When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, ¹³ he sent back this answer: "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. ¹⁴ For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?" Esther 4:12–14

39. Can anyone ever attain a position of power, wealth, or social standing that insulates (protects) them from world or disastrous events (v. 13)? Yes No (Underline One)

40. What did Mordecai believe about God's ability to save (v. 14a)?

41. What would have happened if Esther had not risked her life by approaching the king (v. 14b)?

42. Write Mordecai's words that encouraged and emboldened Esther in her calling (v. 14c):

43. How do you think God is uniquely calling you *for such a time as this*?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #39–43 with your discipleship team.

—End Day Three—

Day Four

Demolish the Negative, Embrace Holy

We continue with Esther's story and special calling. If you have read the Book of Esther, you may have noticed that it does not explicitly mention God. However, His presence and providence are implicit throughout the narrative. God was, and is, always working behind the scenes to fulfill His purposes in events, timing, and deliverance of the Jewish people.

Read Esther 4:15–17 and answer questions 44–46:

Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: ¹⁶ “Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.” ¹⁷ So Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions. Esther 4:15–17

44. How did Esther rely or depend on God (v. 16)?

45. Esther accepted her holy calling. How were her attitude and character transformed?

46. How does your attitude and character still need to be transformed?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #44–46 with your discipleship team.

Definition: *Mantel* is an important role or responsibility that passes from one person to another:

Mordecai had been used by God to raise Esther in a holy manner, notify her of the Jews' death sentence, and to use her royal position for good. Now it was time for Esther to take over with God's holy power. Esther takes up her mantel and seeks God's advice and favor through fasting.

Esther acts decisively and instructs Mordecai and her people what they are to do. She is no longer concerned about her safety or her life. She accepts her unique calling and is willing to die if necessary.

When Esther enters the inner court of the palace, the king holds out the gold scepter. Having spent three days with God in fasting, Esther has a plan. She invites the king and Haman to a special banquet that was prepared for the occasion.

A series of events unfold until, at the God-appointed time, Esther pleads for her people. She reveals her heritage and that because of Haman, even her life would be taken. Infuriated, the king had him hanged on the same gallows Haman had prepared for Mordecai. Moreover, the king granted the Jews permission to assemble and protect themselves against their enemies.

Consequently, the lives of the Jews were spared and they praised God. To commemorate this deliverance, the Jewish people celebrate the holiday or festival known as Purim to this day, praising God for His intervention.

Another way of describing God's intervention is His holy power. God's power was available to Esther to accomplish His plans for the Jewish people and it is also available for believers to accomplish His plans and purposes today. God's power is available—but always on His terms. Esther is a good example.

Esther was beautiful, rich, loved, favored, famous, and had significant influence. She was also queen of Persia, one of the largest empires of her time.⁶ Life was good. God, however, had not given her all those blessings to keep for herself. She was called to use her gifts for a greater purpose.

Not everyone is, or will be a queen or a king. Nevertheless like Esther, the queen, disciples are called to use our positions and talents for a greater purpose—God's purpose. The Spirit of God takes the divine initiative, but we as disciples also have responsibility to act and obey.

In 2 Timothy 2:20 below, the apostle Paul used a large house and its furnishings to represent the church and its members. Some members who take Christ seriously, follow Him closely and are used for special, eternal purposes. Those members who do not take Christ seriously and do not follow Him, cannot be used for God's special purposes.

Read 2 Timothy 2:20–21 and answer questions 47–48:

In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes [honor] and some for common use [dishonor].²¹ Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. 2 Timothy 2:20–21

47. How can you prepare yourself to be an instrument for God's special purpose (vv. 20–21)?

48. Explain the balance between human responsibility and divine initiative (v. 21)? (See also Ephesians 2:8–10; Philippians 2:12–13; James 2:26)

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #47–48 with your discipleship team.

Receiving God's power for His special purposes can be exhilarating. However, we still have a part to play, and it can be *less* than exhilarating. First, we are called to turn away from sin and be holy. Second, we may encounter persecution, danger, and rejection. Recall when God was going to work through Esther to save her people, she had to face the possibility of death.

⁶ The Persian empire spanned across a vast territory, covering significant portions of modern-day Iran, Iraq, Turkey, and parts of Egypt, Greece, and Central Asia.

Esther's plan required the participation of her husband, King Xerxes. Despite being the queen, she risked execution for approaching the king uninvited. She feared for her life and hesitated. But encouraged by her uncle Mordecai, Esther accepted her holy assignment and began by denying herself and seeking the Lord. She and the Jewish community fasted for three days.

Fear can trigger a wide range of emotions. Esther might have experienced anxiety, insecurity, nervousness, or even depression before she answered God's calling. She may have continued wrestling with these feelings even after she resolved to act on behalf of her people.

Definitions: *Anxiety* is a feeling of worry, nervousness, or unease, typically about an imminent event or something with an uncertain outcome. *Insecurity* is uncertainty or anxiety about oneself; lack of confidence. *Nervousness* is being easily agitated or distressed; high-strung or jumpy. A *depressed* person is in a state of general unhappiness or despondency. *Depression* can be a mood disorder that is marked by varying degrees of sadness, despair, and loneliness and that is typically accompanied by inactivity, guilt, loss of concentration, social withdrawal, sleep disturbances, and sometimes suicidal tendencies.

Trials do come and they are not easy. Like Esther, we may face ordeals with the possibility of death. Or we may encounter troubles with finances, relationships, approval, infertility, rejection, or some other kind of loss. Life is hard and challenges arrive at everyone's door. However, we are specifically referring to believers—disciples of Christ.

Difficulties can subsequently trigger various negative feelings such as anger, resentment, anxiety, insecurity, depression, and despair. Even for the faithful, coping with these kinds of harmful emotions can, and most likely will happen. It's essential to recognize that struggling with these feelings is nothing to be ashamed of. In fact, it may be wise to seek appropriate, professional support.

One of the dangers of these unwanted emotions is “negative creep.” At first your feelings are directed at the situation or perpetrator which, by the way, is still sinful. But then your sinful thoughts and opinions begin to spill over to other people and then, even to God. You may think: *Why should I care about other people? I have enough problems of my own. Why did God let this happen? God doesn't really love or care for me.*

49. Have you ever experienced “negative creep,” and if so, what did you do to overcome it?

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #49 with your discipleship team.

Negative emotions are strong and can be hard to control. They are particularly difficult to control when we try to use weapons of the world against these unwelcome emotions. The world's weapons involve human strategies for dealing with troubles or challenges.

The weapons of the world are based on sensual and selfish attitudes. These worldly weapons would include force, deceit, violence, and excessive use of authority. They are not grounded in God.

Can worldly weapons be used against our emotions? We can try to force our emotions to behave or fight against those people causing us trouble and thus, affecting our feelings. But these tactics are destined to fail.

Disciples do not fight with worldly weapons but with spiritual weapons. Our weapons include God's Word, faith in Christ, prayer, and trust in God (Ephesians 6:10–18). There are others.

Read 2 Corinthians 10:4–5 and answer questions 50–52:

The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. ⁵ We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.
2 Corinthians 10:4–5 (A stronghold is an incorrect thinking pattern affecting how one responds.)

50. Are believers supposed to fight with the weapons of the world—those based on carnal (sensual) and corrupt principles (v. 4a)? Yes No Sometimes (Underline One)

51. Why do the weapons believers fight with, demolish strongholds (v. 4b)?

52. How do *you* take captive every thought and make it obedient to Christ (v. 5)?

We cannot always be sure if we are under spiritual attack, God is testing us, or our problems are coming from our own sinful nature. Rather than pinpoint the source, use your time to combat the negative and embrace the holy. In addition to the spiritual weapons listed above, here are four additional ways to demolish harmful emotions and the ensuing negative creep: (1) Seek God, (2) Embrace your call, (3) Give thank offerings, and (4) Crucify the flesh.

Four Ways to Demolish Harmful Emotions

(1) Seek God

First, seek God and pour out your heart to Him. The Lord knows you and your situation—trust Him. Expect to hear from God and be open to His response.

Be aware of your preconceived ideas and beliefs so that you are not deceived and end up hearing your own words instead of God's. Reading the Bible while praying is an excellent way to stay focused on God and His answers. When you close your prayer time, ask the Lord to use your circumstances for His glory.

53. Read Psalm 62:8. What are the two commands of this verse and the reason for them?

Trust in him at all times, you people; pour out your hearts to him, for God is our refuge.
Psalm 62:8 (A refuge provides shelter, protection, and safety from danger, trouble, or harm.)

Read Psalm 34:17–19 and answer questions 54–57:

The righteous cry out, and the LORD hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. ¹⁸ The LORD is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. ¹⁹ The righteous person may have many troubles, but the LORD delivers him from them all; Psalm 34:17–19

54. When you cry out to the Lord, does He hear you (v. 17)? Yes No (Underline One)

55. Why might God not always respond or deliver believers in the way they think or expect? (See Isaiah 55:8–9; Romans 8:28–29; 2 Corinthians 12:9.)

56. Who is the Lord close to, and who does He save (v. 18)?

57. Believers are righteous, godly, and holy in Christ. Even though we have many troubles, what does the Lord promise to do (v. 19)?

Disciples of Christ may not be delivered from our troubles in the timing or the way we anticipate, but God is true to His Word. While facing hardships God is our refuge. He is a place of safety, strength, and protection. We have His unwavering care and support.

The Lord not only comforts us, but He also strengthens us. God’s holy power and strength are available through His Holy Spirit to help overcome trials, temptations, troubles, and negative emotions. We seek God and rely on His power during our times of weakness knowing in Christ we will be victorious.

Read Colossians 1:10–11 and answer questions 58–60:

... so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God, ¹¹ being strengthened with all power according to his glorious might so that you may have great endurance and patience . . . Colossians 1:10–11

58. No matter your circumstances, what should you strive for (v. 10)?

59. How will you be strengthened to live a life worthy of the Lord (v. 11)?

60. Action Step: Memorize Colossians 1:10–11 above.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #50–59 and memory verse #60.

—End Day Four—

Day Five

Demolishing Negative Emotions Continued

(2) Embrace your call

In Christ, your call is special and general. Esther was an example of a special calling in God's assignment to save the Jewish people. All disciples' have a general calling to become like Jesus. We are to progressively be transformed into His holy image. In order to counteract negative emotions, we need to embrace both our special and general calling.

Read 2 Thessalonians 1:11 and answer questions 61–62:

With this in mind, we constantly pray for you, that our God may make you worthy of his calling, and that by his power he may bring to fruition your every desire for goodness and your every deed prompted by faith. 2 Thessalonians 1:11

61. The apostle Paul, Silas, and Timothy prayed constantly that God would make the Thessalonian Christians worthy of His calling. Will you pray this same request for yourself and other believers? Yes No (Underline One)

62. How will God enable you to live a life worthy of His call and accomplish all the good things your faith prompts you to do?

Whether a special or general calling, God's power will enable us to fulfill His will. His will is for us to think like His Son and have holy thoughts and emotions. Pray and build up your faith to embrace, grasp, and seize your calling. Persevere, persist, endure.

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #61–62 with your discipleship team.

(3) Give Thank Offerings

After reviewing two ways for combating harmful emotions, (1) Seeking God and (2) Embracing our Call, we turn to (3) Give Thank Offerings. In the Old Testament, the Israelites had the option to give thank offerings to the Lord while they were making fellowship offerings with an animal sacrifice. The thank offering which could accompany the fellowship offering, was comprised of two thick loaves of bread, one made without yeast and one with yeast (Leviticus 7:11–13).

The Israelites offered thanksgiving to God for deliverance from their enemies, sickness, trouble, and death. They also gave thanks for answered prayer and for blessings received. It was a demonstrative way to honor God.

Read Psalm 50:14–15 and answer questions 63–65:

"Sacrifice thank offerings to God, fulfill your vows to the Most High, ¹⁵ and call on me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you will honor me." Psalm 50:14–15

Definition: *Honor* is defined in Psalm 50 as showing admiration, dignity, and a sense of reverence or high regard towards God. To *honor* God means to acknowledge His infinite worth, excellence, and significance, often through words, actions, or gestures that express esteem, deep respect, and appreciation.

63. What three things does God command His people to do (vv. 14–15)?

64. After the Israelites sacrificed thank offerings, fulfilled their vows, and called on God, what would happen (v. 15)?

65. What does the command fulfill your vows to the Most High mean (v. 14)? (See Deuteronomy 26:17)

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #63–65 with your discipleship team.

Fulfilling your vows could simply mean keeping one's promises or keeping one's word. But it also suggests that God is reminding the Israelites of their covenant with Him, which includes the moral law. That is, according to their agreement, God would bless and protect His people if they walked in His ways, kept His statutes, and commands (Deuteronomy 26:17).

The Israelites' obedience to God was a demonstration of their love for Him (John 14:15). God desires authentic love and honor from His people, seeking their sincere devotion. He emphasized mercy and compassion over mere ceremonial sacrifices (Hosea 6:6). It is no different today—God desires our hearts.

Is there a formal way of offering thanksgiving today? The sacrificial offering for atonement of sins has been fulfilled through Jesus Christ's ultimate sacrifice on the cross. Since there is no more animal sacrifices, there are no accompanying thank offerings. However, the principle of gratitude and thanksgiving remains an integral part of the believer's life and worship.

We give thank offerings by having a grateful heart in all circumstances (1 Thessalonians 5:18). The focus is on a heart of thanksgiving and a lifestyle that reflects gratitude toward God through praise, prayer, giving, service, and a continual acknowledgment of God's goodness, grace, and provision in our lives.

Raise your hands in thanksgiving throughout the day and night as you recall God's blessings on you in Christ Jesus. Honor God by sharing with others how He has worked in your life.

Jesus is the "once for all sacrifice" so offer your thank offering through Him and the cross to God the Father (Hebrews 10:10). In this way, your thank offering is paired with the one, righteous, and holy sacrifice of God's Son. Since Jesus' single sacrifice is good for all time, we can offer thanks to God through Jesus, morning, noon, and night.

(4) Crucify the Flesh

We have addressed three spiritual strategies to demolish harmful emotions and stop negative creep by (1) Seeking God, (2) Embracing your call, and (3) Giving thank offerings. Now, we direct our attention to (4) Crucifying the flesh.

Definitions: To *crucify the flesh* is a phrase that means to turn away from all the sinful passions, desires, and deeds of the human nature or body by figuratively nailing them to the cross. The *flesh* represents the fallen or sin nature of humanity that acts in opposition to the Holy Spirit.

Sinful emotions and thoughts come from our sin nature, also identified as the flesh. It is a strenuous battle. Even the great and pious apostle Paul struggled against his sinful nature. Sometimes he did not understand what he did, because he did not do the good he wanted to do (Romans 7:15–15).

On the one hand, Paul delighted in God’s law—but on the other hand, Paul’s mind was drawn to sin. He knew the only way to be delivered from his struggle between good and evil was through Jesus Christ. We cannot win the fight against our harmful emotions and feelings unless we rely on Jesus and His Spirit.

However, relying on the Holy Spirit does not mean that we do not have a serious part to play in this battle. We must cooperate and put to death the wrong thoughts and possible ensuing actions. It is not easy. That is why the Bible labels the process—crucifying the flesh.

Read Romans 8:13–14 and answer questions 66–69:

For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live. ¹⁴ *For those who are led by the Spirit of God are the children of God.* Romans 8:13–14 (See also Romans 6:6–7; Galatians 5:24–25)

66. Fill in the blanks. For if you live according to the _____, you will _____; but if by the _____ you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will _____ (v. 13).

67. What does it mean that a person will die or live (v. 13)?

68. How do you put to death the misdeeds of the body i.e., crucify the flesh (v. 13)?

69. If you are led by the Spirit of God, how are you related to God (v. 14)?

If a person ignores the Holy Spirit and gives into their sin nature, they will face spiritual death and separation from God. However, when a person submits to the guidance and empowerment of the Spirit, they will enjoy eternal life and relationship with God. Again, we have warring factions

within us, sinful passions vs. holy passions, and the battle can be intensive. Do not give up, but stand firm.

Christians worldwide are enduring severe persecution and even death. Recently, I came across distressing news revealing that on December 24, 2023, Muslim assailants massacred 160 Christians in Nigeria. Among the victims were numerous women, children, and elderly individuals, tragically unable to flee. Shockingly, in 2022, Nigeria recorded the highest number of Christian deaths due to religious persecution, totaling 5,014.⁷

70. Read Psalm 62:5–6. No matter how tragic your situation or how severe your persecution—where do you find rest, hope, and deliverance?

Yes, my soul, find rest in God; my hope comes from him.⁶ Truly he is my rock and my salvation; he is my fortress, I will not be shaken. Psalm 62:5–6

71. According to Ephesians 6:10, who is the source of our strength?

Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. Ephesians 6:10

72. Read 2 Samuel 22:29–30. Who turns our darkness into light and helps us in all our battles?

You, LORD, are my lamp; the LORD turns my darkness into light.³⁰ With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall. 2 Samuel 22:29–30

Accountability: Be prepared to share your answers #66–72 with your discipleship team.

As we end this lesson, please remember that believers have been made holy and receive our holy power by Christ's sacrifice on the cross. This is our position before God. But that does not mean that our responsibilities are over or that our choices do not matter. Christ's death and resurrection does not change us into robots.

God is honored by our willingness to obey, follow, and step into the unknown by faith. The more we give ourselves over to God and allow the Holy Spirit free rein in our lives, the more we will grow spiritually. And spiritual maturity equals holy power through Christ Jesus, our Lord.

—End of Day Five and Lesson 10—

Next—Lesson 11: Refresh—Sharing Christ, Unit 4: Disciple of Christ

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⁷ Christian Daily International-Morning Star News, December 26, 2023<<https://www.christianpost.com/news/160-christians-killed-in-nigeria-attacks-launched-at-christmas.html>>(accessed 12/27/2023.)