My Life, The Big Picture
Small Group Bible Study
My Life, The Big Picture
Small Group Bible Study
Barnwell Baptist Church

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My Life, The Big Picture

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Study Verse:

20 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 NIV
Introduction

As a pastor, I have never met anyone who felt their spiritual life was exactly where God desired. In other words no one ever feels they have “arrived spiritually.” With that said, some Christians are enjoying the process of becoming who God desires for them to be. For such Christians life is an adventure; one where they can hardly wait to see what God is going to do next.

Unfortunately, most professing believers do not experience such an adventurous walk with God. Few things burden a pastor more than watching good people experience a “roller coaster” spiritual life. They find themselves facing normal life problems so they seek God for a few weeks. Sometimes they find improvement and sometimes they do not find what they are seeking. Either way, they eventually slip away from their relationship with God.

I recall one young man who went through several job changes including one where he was actually terminated. Each time he would meet with me and we would discuss his situation and pray together. I knew this young man was very bright and had great potential. I even felt he was fired inappropriately. We prayed together that God would provide the right position for him to be able to support his family. During this time he was faithful in worship and serving God through the church in many ways. Eventually a great job came along that utilizes his talent and affords him the ability to support his family. Shortly thereafter he and his family fell out of church and allowed their lives to fall outside the realm of Christian fellowship. They show up for worship on occasion but make no ever to serve or be faithful.

This is only one example of the spiritual life I observe all too often in professing Christians. It is heart breaking to observe God work in a believers life only to have them lose sight of God’s blessing and miss what God would do next. This is first evidenced by lack of attendance to worship and then leads to a turning of direction in lifestyle and values.

Is this the result of a lack of faith or was there a lack of genuine commitment from the beginning? From my perspective, it appears to be the result of marginal or provisional faith. It is faith that says I will give this a try to see how things turn out. What is lacking is a total commitment to allow God to control ones life. It is a faith that barely allows God to squeeze into ones busy life for a period to see how things work out. Unfortunately God is just as easily squeezed out of the same busy life when the desired results are not immediately seen.

God simply does not work that way. God is interested in genuine commitment to Him and a willingness to surrender to the work He desires to do in our lives. Consider Paul’s commitment to our Lord in his letter to the Galatians.

20 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 NIV

How does your commitment compare to that of Paul? Are you so fully committed that you are living by faith? Are you allowing Christ to live through you?

As you will see in this study, God doesn’t follow our orders, we are to follow His. And God very often does not work things out in our life in the way we envision or expect. God knows the big picture and He knows our heart. He knows our sincerity or lack of sincerity full well. He is looking for believers willing to surrender and completely commit to His work.
Often in life, we get so consumed with what is right before us that we fail to look at the big picture. We often get so wrapped up in the immediate problems, tasks and challenges we face daily that we fail to back up and look at where our life is going.

Where do you want to be in 5, 10 or even 20 years from now? Are you doing the things today that will get you there? Where do you want to be as a father, mother, spouse, student or in your career? Where do you want to be spiritually in your relationship with God?

**Discussion Questions**

1. What are some examples in an adult’s life where one might get so caught up in small things that we miss the big picture of the important things in our life?

2. What are some examples in a teenager’s life where one might get so caught up in small things that we miss the big picture of important things in our life?

In this study, we are going to step back and take a look at the big picture of our lives. We will look deeply into the things that can give you the rich fulfilled life and joy we all seek.

Each chapter includes a set of questions where you are asked to write down your answers. These are to be private unless you choose to share them with others or the group.

When you are asked to write down your answers, you need to be completely honest with yourself and God. Don’t just write down simple quick answers. Take the time to think of the deeper problems and try to get to the best answers for your own personal situation.
Chapter 1: Can My Life Be Changed

In the New Testament, all sorts of people from different walks of life had a personal encounter with Jesus Christ.

- Jesus meets two thieves at the cross. One mocks him and the other believes in him. To the one who believes, Jesus promises that in spite of his crime, he will be with him in paradise.

- Jesus meets a little man named Zacchaeus who is basically a crook. He is a tax collector who rips people off every chance he gets. After his encounter with Jesus, he says, “Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

- Jesus meets men who are fishermen by trade. He amazes them so much that they leave fishing to become his disciples. They become instrumental in establishing the early church and author several books of the Bible.

- Jesus meets two sisters and their brother and becomes very close friends with them. One sister worships him so much she begins to rub perfume on his feet at dinner. The brother becomes ill and dies. When Jesus arrives, he weeps and raises him from the dead by pronouncing, “Lazarus come forth!”

- Jesus meets a woman at the well who has been with a lot of men in her lifetime. To her he says, “Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst again.” She became one of His followers.

There are many other examples of encounters with Jesus. We could go on and on. But consider the common threads in each of these encounters with Jesus.

1. Jesus knew their heart from the outset. He knew their weaknesses and guilt.
2. Each one was thirsting to know Jesus more genuinely.
3. In each encounter their life was completely changed.

Notice that in some cases not only were their lives changed, but their entire career became different. In other cases their career stayed the same but their integrity and purpose in life changed. In the case of the woman at the well, her morals and lifestyle changed drastically.

Jesus Christ knows your heart through and through. He desires to change your life for the better; much better. Jesus is less concerned about what career you choose and more concerned about how you live your life. It may be that God is calling you to a ministry. On the other hand he may desire to change your lifestyle and moral convictions. Whatever change Christ wants to bring about in your life, you can be sure our Lord desires for you to be happy and filled with the fullness of life that only He can offer.

10 The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10 NIV

The Greek work translated full or abundantly literally means “excessively, superior in quantity and quality; very high, beyond measure”. Whether you are father, mother or student, we often fail to discover what God wants to do in our life because we can’t or won’t take the time to talk to God.
and allow the Holy Spirit to speak to us. We are usually too focused on the challenges that are before us.

Commit now to step back during this study and open your heart and mind to God. Devote your heart and thoughts to God and allow Him to speak to you and change your life.

Questions

Answer the following questions as honestly and deeply as you can. Do not write down the simplest thought that comes to mind.

1. What are some things you really wish you could change about your life?

2. What is keeping you from changing the things noted in questions 1?

3. What are some things you think God would like to change about you?

4. What is preventing God from changing the things noted in question 3?

5. If you could do what you really desire to do with your life, what would it be?

6. What prevents you from doing what you noted in question 5?

Exercise

Find a quiet place to pray alone. Confess any sin and ask God to open your heart during this study. Ask God to help you have a vision and have the faith to change the things He wants to change in your life as well as the things you would like to change about your life.

Be prepared to discuss your thoughts on this chapter when the small group meets.
Chapter 2: Accepting God

We have all seen the Serenity Prayer which reads, “God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change; courage to change the things I can; and wisdom to know the difference.”

A huge step in experiencing the fullness of life God has to offer is in the area of acceptance. There are certain things we must learn to accept about God, Ourselves and Others.

This may seem like a contradiction to what we discussed in chapter one. I said God can change your life big time. Now I am saying there are certain things we must learn to accept. Spiritual discouragement often comes because of our refusal to accept things we simply cannot change. But when we learn to accept these things, we are then free to move forward without trying to change the things we cannot. In addition, we can capitalize on them and find comfort in knowing God is in control.

Step back for a moment and look at the big picture of God. Think about everything you know about God and consider the following.

1. What amazes you about God?
2. What confuses you about God?
3. When have you seen God do something amazing in your life?
4. When have you felt God has let you down?

Among other things, we must learn to accept the following things about God.

- **God knows everything.** God knows every corner of your heart. He knows your needs, your desires and thoughts. He knows your faith, when you are sincere and when you are not.

- **God can do absolutely anything.** From creating the world, mountains and oceans to breathing life into a newborn baby; God can do absolutely anything.

- **God only does what he chooses to do.** God is not subject to peer pressure, financial pressures, time constraints, resource limitations or anything else. He only does what he desires to do; nothing more and nothing less and always in His time.

- **God is kind of crazy.** I don’t mean this in the sense of foolish but in the sense of imaginative. God can envision things you and I can’t begin to picture. We may be thinking a rock when God is thinking a mountain. We may be thinking a C when God is thinking an A+. You may be picturing a new job in your field when God is seeing a completely new profession for you. We may see a little church of worship when God has the blueprints for a huge place of worship for people from all over the county. God has been known to do some pretty outrageous things. Consider his way of saving the world by sending his son to die on the cross. Consider his parting the sea or feeding 5000 with a little bread and a few fish. God has an imagination and vision bigger than all us humans put together.

- **God is like a wild animal.** Not literally but to us he really is like that. We don’t always know what to expect from him. His plans are so much bigger and so much beyond our understanding that we get caught off guard and that often scares us. Sometimes we are so focused on what we expect from God that we can’t see what God is doing around us.
The Bible even tells us God is extremely different from us in many ways.

“For My thoughts are not your thoughts, and your ways are not My ways.” — Isaiah 55:8 NIV

We need to recognize God does not always resolve problems the way we think they should be resolved. He doesn’t always provide the solutions, opportunities and avenues we think are best. Why? Simply put, He is God. He is all knowing and He knows what is best. It is up to us to decide if we can live with this or if we will live at odds with God.

- **God can be persuaded.** This is one of the often misunderstood attributes of God. Read 2 Kings 20:1-6 and see how God changed his mind because of King Hezekiah’s repentance and gave him 15 more years of life. Or read the book of Jonah where God was ready to destroy the city of Nineveh but spared them when they repented. God is open to our desires as long as we are sincere in our attitude and commitment. But God is never fooled. He always knows our heart thoroughly.

God can do anything he wants, when he wants, how he chooses and when he decides to do it. He is not confined or constrained in any way. He has no limitations and we certainly cannot place limitations on Him.

A huge step in having your life changed comes when you accept everything about God. For some people this is very difficult. Some people expect God to do exactly what they want and there is little wiggle room. When he doesn’t do things their way, they get discouraged and abandon their faith; missing out on abundant life. The biblical and spiritual thing to do is to completely accept God and everything about him. We need to accept his decisions and his timing in everything.

When you really think about it why would we want or expect the creator of the universe to be anything less than what we have described? For God to be God, he must be all-knowing, all-powerful, and all-present. To be God, he must be fully able to do what he wants, when he wants and how he chooses. God wants to make a difference in your life but you must first accept Him.

- **God is Love.** With all we have discussed about the attributes of God, there is one more we must not overlook. God is consumed with loving His people. God loves you. This is perhaps the attribute of God we hear the most about yet understand the least.

8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. — 1 John 4:8-10 NIV

Just imagine God loves you so much He sent Christ to the cross to reconcile you with Him. What other great things does He have in store for you? Why would we ever insist on our will over God’s will when we understand His love for us?

God’s love for us is greater than any love we have ever experienced or felt. God will go to outlandish lengths to show his love for us including sending his son to the cross. But that isn’t all. He does many other things to show his love for us as we will see in subsequent chapters.
Questions

1. How do you feel about accepting these attributes of God?
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

2. How has this chapter changed the way you see God and pray to Him?
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

3. In what areas of your life have you fought against the will of God?
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

4. What amazing thing do you want to see God do in your life that He has not done?
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

5. What things has God done in your life for which you are extremely grateful?
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________
   ____________________________________________________________

Exercise

Bow on your knees (or other of position of submission) and surrender before God. Commit to accepting Him the way He is. Commit to acknowledging that He lovingly knows what is best even when you cannot see it. Ask for His forgiveness for the times you have not been faithful because you could not see Him working His will. Ask Him to give you the ability to accept His will and trust Him even when it hurts or disappoints you. Promise you will be steadfast in your faith and commitment regardless of your circumstance.
Chapter 3: Accepting Ourselves

Another aspect of having our lives changed and filled by God involves learning to accept ourselves. No one is exactly who they want to be. We all wish we were better looking, smarter, more talented, more athletic, more creative, better speakers, etc. We all have areas of our life we wish were different.

One comedian joked that when she met her maker, that would be customer service experience of a lifetime. She would finally have the opportunity to address all of the inadequate parts and abilities of her body and personality. She jokingly said she felt like she was made up of all the spare parts that were available at the end a busy production day.

As we grow older, we realize some things we dreamed of becoming aren’t likely to happen. But many of our dreams are possible. We may not be superman, but we may be superman in the eyes of our children and grandchildren. We may not become the President of the United States, but we may be the president of a company or the pastor of a church or the leader in a Bible study. We may not become a cowboy, but we can certainly love and enjoy the outdoors. God is not ignorant of our dreams and desires. He wants to fulfill them but in his way which is always the best way.

Again, as a pastor I meet many people who struggle with the concept of accepting who they are. They do not come out and say “I don’t like who I am.” But they are often focused on others; what others can do or what others have been able to accomplish. They focus so much on what they don’t have that they can’t appreciate what God has given them. Usually they have given up trying to discover what God desires to do in their life. They are too consumed with their “pity party” to look forward.

I grew up as a teenager in a church with an amazing youth ministry. The ministry was mostly centered around the youth choir and music. Almost all of my friends were great musicians playing different instruments and having wonderful voices. For me on the other hand, the musical talent was not there; not even remotely. I tried but I usually embarrassed myself and the rest of the group. I soon realized that I had to allow God to show me how He could use me. I could not be like my friends when it came to music. There had to be some resemblance of a talent in me somewhere.

Accepting who we are opens a big wide door. It allows us to first settle down and stop being frustrated about what we are not and start focusing on who we are. We can quit fretting over the talents we don’t have and start taking inventory of and using what talents we do have.

Don’t miss this important acceptance because there is great freedom to be discovered. There is freedom in recognizing what you have available to you and within you. It is only when we accept ourselves that we can begin to allow God to do awesome things in our life.

13 For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother’s womb. 14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. 15 My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, 16 your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Psalm 139:13-14 NIV

This is not to say who you now is exactly who you will always be; by no means. We become much
better at many things as God works in our life to grow us and enrich our us. You will become much wiser, much quicker at recognizing truth and the right things to do and say in different situations. God’s not done with you. In fact, He is just getting started.

You will discover new talents, abilities and things you love to do. But you must start by accepting who God has made you to be. Then you can become who you desire to be and more importantly who God wants you to be.

**Questions**

1. What are some things about yourself you have struggled to accept?

   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

2. How would you describe your overall feeling about yourself?

   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

3. What are some abilities, strengths and talents that God has given you?

   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

4. Do you feel you are effectively using your God given talents and strengths? Why?

   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

5. What things about your life would you like to see God change?

   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________
   ______________________________________________________

**Exercise**

Find a mirror in your home and take a few minutes to look at yourself. Take a long look at what you see. Recognize that you are God’s creation made just the way he wanted. Now find a private place to pray.

- Acknowledge God for who he is. Tell him you will accept Him and you will accept His desires for your life. Ask God to forgive you for trying to make Him be who you want.
- Ask God to help you accept who you are and help you become the person he wants you to be. Ask God to help you not dwell on the talents of others but rather be thankful for who you are and who you will become with his fullness in your life.
- Promise God you will make a concentrated effort to use your abilities for His glory in the future.
- Thank Him for loving you and making you unique.
Chapter 4: Accepting Others

For everything we wish we could change about ourselves, there is one or more things we wish we could change about someone else close to us. Everyone is different. No two people are just alike. There is no one else in the world exactly like you. You must go to school, work, church and live in a home with people who are different from you. God made all of us different in certain ways. We have different ways of working things out, different ways of dealing with problems and solving them.

Failing to accept others is fertile ground for Satan to attack the heart of any Christian. When we dwell on our issues with others, Satan keeps the frustration stirred preventing us from focusing on what God wants to do in us. Some people live their lives focused on their frustrations with others, building walls around themselves to avoid accepting outsiders.

There are certain fundamental things we must learn to accept about others.

- God made each person differently.
- There is something of God’s likeness in every person.
- Others are in a spiritual growth process just as you are.
- Others have things they know need changing in their life just as you do.
- There are things God desires to change in others just as with you.
- Only God can bring about genuine spiritual change.

There is also freedom in accepting others as they are. When we quit being bothered by those around us, we are free to turn our focus on becoming who God wants us to be. We need to stop fussing and arguing over things we can’t change about people and start taking inventory of what we value and appreciate about them.

Years ago I had a good friend who is a devout Christian but always seemed to have a “hard nosed” personality. He struggled with accepting other people who were not just like him. One day he heard that I was taking a co-worker fishing. This co-worker was not a professing Christian. The co-worker was known for his enjoyment of drinking but overall he was a good person. He had spoken many times privately with me about God, family and such other serious subjects. When my friend heard I was taking the guy fishing, he said to me, “You are a diverse person Bob Tucker.”

In reality, I am not a very diverse person. I had opened up to our co-worker enough to see the good in him. I did not approve of his lifestyle but we were going out on my boat and I had the say so of what we would drink and how we would conduct ourselves. Furthermore it was my prayer that God would use me to help this individual and I believe that took place over time to some degree.

My friend who considered me diverse on the other hand struggled through many difficult years as he was forced to deal with family issues and other matters. He was forced to learn to love and accept others who were quite different from him; including immediate family members. We eventually moved and lost contact. I thought of him often and in a strange twist of events I heard from him recently. He just called to talk and see how things were going. On the back side of his struggles, I listened carefully to a still devout Christian but one with a heart more like Christ. One
less condemning and more loving and compassionate. He spoke of people he is concerned for
and shared how he is trying to reach them where they are in life. My friend has learned the
power of accepting others and understanding God is working in their lives too.

Too often we let little minor things bother us about someone else. All the while we are
overlooking or taking for granted some wonderful characteristics about that person. Too many
marriages and other relationships end because of minor differences we let stand between us.
Usually, God desires to change us just as much as He desires to change those around us.

When asked which commandment was the most important, Jesus responded with “30 Love the
Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your
strength.” But He went on to say loving others as yourself was the second.

“31 The second is this: Love your neighbor as yourself.” Mark 12:31 NIV

In fact, Jesus commands us to love others as He has loved us: “12 My command is this: Love each
other as I have loved you.” John 15:12 NIV

We cannot begin to love others until we are willing to accept others. For most of us, loving others
means loving who we choose to love. But we are commanded to love even those with whom we
have difficulty and differences. We must learn to move past our differences and accept that we
are to love as God loves.

Only God can change people but He uses his children to touch other’s lives. You can be a great
influence for God in the life of others around you or you can be a terrible influence. The choice is
yours to make. You already know God wants you to be a positive Christian influence to others.

Questions

1. What are some things about others around you that really bothers you?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

2. What are some things about others around you that you value and should appreciate?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

3. Name one or more people close to you that you have failed to accept and you have taken their
good qualities for granted while dwelling on your differences.

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

4. For each person listed in question 5, write some good things about that person’s character.

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________

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5. What steps can you take towards accepting others and allowing God to use you without condemning and judging them?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

Exercise

Find a quiet place where you can reflect on this chapter and pray.

- Ask God to forgive you for the wrong you have done and pain you have caused to others close to you. Ask him to help you see more good in others rather than dwelling on the differences that bother you.

- Ask God to show you how to love others and be someone who lifts others up.

- Commit to accepting God for who he is in all of His wisdom even as it relates to others.

- Commit to accepting others and working to be a positive Christian influence to them.

- Take the time to name the people with whom you have trouble accepting. In your prayer, say their name out loud and ask God to help you learn to accept and love that person.
Chapter 5: Accepting God’s Sacrifice

When we backup and look at the big picture of our life, we discover that much of our needless toiling is the result of our failure to accept God, Ourselves and Others.

We go up and down in our relationship with God because He doesn’t do things exactly how and when we want. We become anguished and doubt Him rather than trust his judgment and timing. If we can learn to trust him completely, we can accept what comes our way knowing the outcome is securely in His hands.

28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose. Romans 8:28 NIV

We waste countless time and energy trying to live up to who the world wants us to be and who we wish we were rather than accepting who God created us to be. When we stop trying to be someone else, we become free to be the best we can be with what we have been given.

We all spend too much time getting upset and sometimes angry with others including loved ones. Then we spend even more time trying to undo hurt feelings and getting past the damage of our words and actions. When we learn to accept others and appreciate their strengths, we are free to experience God without the baggage of guilt and damaged relationships.

In a previous chapter I suggested one of the least understood attributes of God is his love for us. Most of us grew up singing “Jesus Loves Me.” Jesus does love us but we don’t always act as though we understand His love for us.

There is a song titled “What a strange way to save the world.” It talks about the uniqueness of God’s plan of salvation through Jesus Christ. When we think of God’s salvation plan we think of Christ dying on the cross and being resurrected from the grave in three days. But there is so much more to God’s plan than just sending Christ to the cross.

- God sent his son to be born in a miraculous and unique birth.
- Jesus spent his life on earth teaching and performing miracles.
- God saw to it that the life of Jesus and the early church was carefully documented so we could learn and grow from it; using it as our daily guide for living.
- God placed Jesus over everything and declares him to be Lord of all who receive Him.
- God sent His Holy Spirit to dwell in the hearts of his children; to search us, teach us, enrich us and guide us miraculously through life.

12 Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, 13 for it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose. Philippians 2:12-13 NIV

God’s work in the life of a believer encompasses many things; miraculous and amazing things. But it all happens because of the cross. The cross is the epiphany of God’s grace and love. The cross is where God poured out his grace to every sinner and thereby offered salvation, justification, reconciliation and sanctification. The cross is where God’s grace becomes real and evident through Christ. There is great life changing power in the cross.

Perhaps you have discovered the life changing power of the cross in your life. But perhaps you

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have stopped at the cross. Has the cross been allowed to change you and sanctify (set apart) you? Has the cross brought death to the things in your life that need to die and life to the things that need to live?

Jesus Christ did not go to the cross begrudgingly. He went obediently to fulfill the will of the father. He was sacrificed for my sin and your sin.

2 Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.  
Hebrews 12:2 NIV

What do you think was the joy set before Jesus that is referenced in this verse? The joy of the cross for Christ is our salvation and all the rewards that come with it. God’s love for you is shown everyday in many ways. But nothing exemplifies His love for you like the cross where Jesus died.

Questions

1. Have you ever been completely overwhelmed by the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross? How?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

2. Take a moment to dwell on God’s love for you. How does it make you feel?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

3. What has been your response to the cross and God’s sacrifice for you?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

4. Do you fill that you have been reconciled with God? Why or why not?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

5. How do you feel about the idea of being sanctified (set apart) with God?
   __________________________________________________________________________
   __________________________________________________________________________

Exercise

Find a time to go to the church this week and kneel or sit at the altar in front of the cross. Take the time to reflect on the loving sacrifice God made for you. Take a few moments to comprehend all that is encompassed in God’s grace and love at the cross. Thank God for His sacrifice and vow to accept it with all your heart.

Consider what you can offer back to God as your sacrifice to Him.

____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________
Chapter 6: Offering Your Sacrifice

When we fully comprehend the sacrifice and love shown to us by our Father, it is breathtaking. Understanding the cross becomes a thrust upon our soul. Our inner being and everything within us will say in unison, “I am broken.”

We will fall to our knees in humble gratitude. We will thank God for the sacrifice, love and grace that has been poured out upon us. The Bible tells us this experience is what each of our souls longs for. Some people recognize this while others foolishly reject the very thing so desperately needed.

But when we fully comprehend the sacrifice of God, there is only one truly appropriate response. We sacrifice ourselves back to him.

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 NIV

This is where many people come to a tragic impasse in their Christian walk. This is why our church roles have names of many people who have been baptized but either no longer attend or rarely attend. This is when people become disenchanted with their faith and fall by the wayside.

This is the evidence of marginal or provisional faith we spoke of in the introduction. Often people are eager to receive whatever God has for them but they are not willing to offer anything back.

When people do not respond to God’s love and grace by giving themselves back to God, they miss the very essence of salvation. They have a head knowledge of what God has done but they fail to participate in the miraculous experiences planned for them because they are unwilling to become living sacrifices to God.

What about your own life? Have you committed yourself and everything you have back to Jesus Christ? Have you been so impressed; so overwhelmed by His sacrifice that you have given yourself as a sacrifice in return?

Paul said, I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. “ Can you say this about your own life?

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation. That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ’s ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ’s behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 NIV

What do you think it means to be crucified with Christ? What do you think it means to become a new creature in Christ.

Jesus said, You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; to be made new in the attitude of your minds; and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.” Matthew 5:33-37 NIV
Illus: My wife likes to eat at Firehouse Sub. When we order a sandwich, they always ask, “Do you want your sandwich fully involved?” That means do you want everything that goes on it.

When we become “Fully Involved” with Christ, we become new creatures. That means:

- **New Slate** - Our sins are no longer counted against us. We have a fresh start with God and others.
- **New Attitude** - We gain a new attitude about life, heaven, hell, God, sin, money, loved ones, our self, our neighbors and even our enemies.
- **New Purpose** - Your purpose in life is no longer self-serving. You desire to be righteous in God’s sight and serve him. Your life purpose is to follow your Savior.

As Christians, we must commit to accept God, receive His sacrifice and offer ourselves in return to Him. In doing so, we will find great fulfillment and satisfaction. God knows the sincerity of your heart. The Bible says, “God will not be mocked.”

God has the power to change your life completely but you must be willing to commit to him. Don’t make the mistake of failing to commit everything back to God. Give God everything about you and everything you have. Sacrifice it all and watch Him multiply your life.

**Questions**

1. What has been your personal response to the cross and God’s great sacrifice for you?

2. Have you responded to God’s grace by giving your life back to him as a sacrifice?

3. In what ways have you held back from giving yourself to God?

4. Are you willing to give over the things you have held back from sacrificing to God?

5. What areas of your life and what possessions do you need to surrender to God?

**Exercise**

Find a quiet private place to pray. Once again, reflect on the sacrifice God has made for you. Now, sacrifice yourself to Him in response. Name the things or areas where you have been holding back from committing to Him and surrender them.

Surrender your all to Him and ask Him to make you a new creature in Christ.
Chapter 7: Living In Fullness

Once we go through the process of accepting who God is, who God made in us and others, we are free to discover what God desires to do in our life. When we comprehend the depth of God’s sacrifice for us and we respond by sacrificing ourselves back to him, then God is free to use us and all we have, for his glory.

This is when you need to put on your seatbelt and get ready for the ride of your life. This is when God starts doing things in your life that are far greater than what can be accomplished by mortal men. This is where you become addicted to thrill of seeing God work in and around you.

There awaits another exciting threshold in our spiritual life. This is a frontier like no other. It changes the way we live, think and act. It is the process of living in the fullness of the Trinity; the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

6 So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, 7 rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. 8 See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ. 9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form. Colossians 2:6-9 NIV

In order to experience the fullness God has to offer, we must learn to live in the fullness of the Trinity. There is a life beyond what most people experience. Few people understand and experience the ultimate joy of living in the Trinity of God.

Living in the Trinity of God, means we not only trust God and sacrifice ourselves to the work of Christ but we also allow the Holy Spirit of God to direct us.

Just prior to his death on the cross, Jesus made an amazing promise:

16 And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever — 17 the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you. John 14:16-17 NIV

The Holy Spirit is given to us not for a moment but for a lifetime. Every believer has the Holy Spirit available to them but it is up to us to allow it to direct our lives. Most Christians limit or lock out the Holy Spirit. I believe this is because most fear where it might lead them.

Billy Graham said, “To be Spirit-filled is to be controlled or dominated by the Spirit’s presence and power. This is not easy because men don’t really want to be controlled by anything.”

Ephesians 5:18 declares, “do not be drunk with wine... but be filled with the Spirit.” Paul uses this comparison to illustrate a point. He is showing that a person who is filled with alcohol will be controlled by the alcohol. Likewise, a person filled with the Holy Spirit will be controlled by the Spirit. Just as alcohol will affect one’s speech, thinking, actions, character and abilities, the Holy Spirit will do the same, but in a very divine way.

The question is what or who will be in control of your life? Have you ever earnestly asked God to fill you with the Holy Spirit? Have you ever surrendered yourself to the power of the Holy Spirit?

The fact is, most people associate the Holy Spirit with a feeling. When people are in church and hear a song or testimony that emotionally touches their heart, they associate it as feeling the Holy

My Life, The Big Picture
Spirit. But that is not the work of the Holy Spirit. The Bible tells us the Holy Spirit is a counselor and that it guides us in daily living and truth. The Holy Spirit isn’t about feeling and emotions but about working in our daily life. It allows us to see things more clearly, make wiser decisions, seize opportunities and recognize the truth.

When we learn to live by the Holy Spirit and allow it to direct our lives, we begin to see remarkable things happen in our life each day.

“If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink. 38 Whoever believes in me, as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him.” John 7:37 NIV

When you live by the Holy Spirit your life becomes changed and your character changes. The Holy Spirit tempers your anger, helps you control your impulses and leads you to live more Christ-like. That doesn’t mean you are perfect but it does mean you are changing for the better.

I have a business with several trucks. For years, we only had one large truck to handle the tough jobs. The problem was the truck was often in and out of the shop. A while back the truck was in the shop over a week and we were in desperate need of it. They finally called and said it was ready and we rushed the driver over to Mobile to get it on the road. The driver got to the first job site and called to say the truck had already shutdown on him three times. This was terrible news. Without the Holy Spirit I could have thrown the phone across the room. But I stopped a moment to allow the Holy Spirit to take control. I calmly told the driver to take it back to the shop and I would be over to pick him up. The Holy Spirit quickly reminded me that God is in control and as frustrating as this situation was, there was no good to come from letting it anger me.

This is only a small example. You can also meet someone only to have the Holy Spirit speak and let you know there is something divine about this acquaintance. God will send you to people and people to you for His purpose. You will see God open doors you never imagined possible. God is working His magic of the Holy Spirit in your life.

31 To the Jews who had believed him, Jesus said, “If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.” John 8:31-32 NIV

I have had well intentioned church people say many foolish things like; “All religions worship the same God” or “Everyone will go to heaven as long as they believe something.” They know this is not the truth of the Bible but they say it because deep down inside, they aren’t living by the truth. They believe in God and the Bible but they aren’t living in the fullness of God. They aren’t living under the power of the Holy Spirit.

When we live by the Holy Spirit, we know the truth and the truth becomes our guide in our speech and actions. Beth Moore put it this way, “A person can receive Christ as Savior, serve him for decades, and meet him face-to-face in glory without ever experiencing the satisfaction in Him on this earth.” Unfortunately, I believe this describes many Christians who never live by the leadership of the Holy Spirit. They never get to see God work miraculously in their life.

Does this describe you? Have you experienced the satisfaction and freedom of living in the fullness of the Holy Spirit?

19 Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? 1 Corinthians 6:19 NIV
God wants to do miraculous things in your life through the Holy Spirit. But a word of caution. There are some things that we can do that prevent the Holy Spirit from working in us.

What are some things that might prevent the Holy Spirit from working in us? Prayerlessness, disobedience, selfishness, un-forgiveness, not studying the Word, lack of loving others and lack of genuine worship.

Quote: “I’ve had more trouble with D.L. Moody than any other man alive.” D. L. Moody

We are usually the problem. We are the ones preventing God’s Holy Spirit from working and being real in our lives. While we are busy looking for a feeling, God is saying; “confess, trust and obey me.”

10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. James 4:10 NIV

If we will confess our sins and seek the Spirit, it will work mighty things in our lives. We must be cautious to not allow ourselves to get in the way of the work of the Spirit. Living in the fullness of God means trusting God. It means sacrificing ourselves to Christ and it means seeking, trusting and obeying the Holy Spirit. This is the Spirit filled life.

Do you desire freedom in your life? Do you desire miracles in your life? Do you want lasting peace? Live in the fullness of the Trinity; God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Questions
1. What are the areas of your life that are empty?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

2. What substitutes have you used to fill these empty areas?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

3. Do you long to live in the fullness of God?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

4. Have you ever quietly prayed for God to fill you with His Holy Spirit?

_____________________________________________________________________________
_____________________________________________________________________________

Exercise

Find a quiet and private place to pray.

Confess the empty areas of your life to God. Repent from all sin including any substitutes you have used to find fulfillment.

Ask God to fill you with the Holy Spirit and satisfy every aspect of your life with Jesus Christ.

Commit to allowing the Holy Spirit to lead you in everything. Commit to trust Him completely.

Privately partake of the Lord’s Supper as you commit to live in the fullness of the Trinity.
Chapter 8: Sharing Your Experiences

For many people, the kind of commitments discussed in this study do not come natural or voluntarily. Unfortunately, many if not most of us must reach a moment of tragedy or great difficulty in our life before we are willing to completely surrender to God and seek His way.

It is my prayer that you have voluntarily taken the steps of acceptance, sacrifice and surrender and that you are already seeing the fruits of walking in the fullness of God.

In this final session together we will share some of what God is doing in each of our lives. Pray about everything happening in your life. Before you react to life’s surprises and challenges, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in words and actions.

Take note of the little things and the big things where the fullness of God’s Holy Spirit leads you. You may need to go back and re-read the prior chapters. Remind yourself of God’s sacrifice for you and your sacrifice to Him.

Questions

1. Share some areas of your life where you are experiencing the Holy Spirit at work.
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________

2. What are some things that distract you from living the fullness of the Spirit?
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________

3. How has this study helped your understanding of God and your commitment to Him?
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________
   ___________________________________________________________

Other Verses

The L ORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the L ORD looks at the heart.” 1 Samuel 16:7 NIV

“. . . but those who hope in the L ORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” Isaiah 40:31 NIV

Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Psalm 51:10 NIV

4 The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. 5 But if anyone obeys his word, God’s love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did. 1 John 2:4-6 NIV

2 You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar. 3 You discern my going out and my lying down; you are familiar with all my ways. 4 Before a word is on my tongue you know it completely, O L ORD. 5 You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Psalm 139:2-6 NIV