

PRACTICAL *CHRISTIAN* LIVING



*A discipleship series designed to equip
men and women to live a dynamic life,
filled with the Holy Spirit.*

AN OPPORTUNITY



Practical Christian Living

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“The Christian life is about more than being forgiven, more even than making it to heaven. The heart of Christianity is about transformation—about a God who isn’t just concerned with our ‘spiritual lives,’ but who wants to impact every aspect of living. It’s realizing that God meets us not in a monastery, but on Main Street, and that all of ordinary, daily life has the potential to be lived as if Jesus Himself were the one living it.”

— JOHN ORTBERG, *The Life You’ve Always Wanted*

It is difficult—maybe impossible—to live a life that reflects Jesus without comprehending the love Jesus has for us. Then, and only then, can our lives be a faithful response to Christ. In the Parable of the Sower, Jesus illustrates that people respond to Him and His Word in four ways. Read Mark 4:3-8 and 14-20, and then reflect on the following question:

WHICH SOIL WOULD YOU LIKE TO HAVE REPRESENT YOUR LIFE?

Most Christians today would like to experience this abundant fruitfulness in their walk with Christ but don’t know where to begin. God desires for each Christian to experience a dynamic, fruitful, and fulfilling life. *Practical Christian Living (PCL)* is offered as an opportunity to help you develop a consistent and growing walk with God.

WHAT IS PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN LIVING?

It is a discipleship series designed to help you grow in your love for God and for others through Bible study, evangelism, and prayer. You will also meet with your group leader from time to time. *PCL* will provide an environment where you will be able to grow spiritually, depend on God’s power, and love others biblically. The sessions will last from 60 to 90 minutes a week during an initial ten-to-twelve-week period. There will also be an opportunity for you to continue for a second section as well.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF JOINING PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN LIVING?

You will have an opportunity to grow in your relationship with God and experience His power.

“I pray that out of His glorious riches He may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Ephesians 3:16,17, NIV).

Your understanding of God’s Word will deepen, and your prayer life will be strengthened.

“Let your roots grow down into Him, and let your lives be built on Him. Then your faith will grow strong in the truth you were taught, and you will overflow with thankfulness” (Colossians 2:7, NLT).

You will have the opportunity to develop strong Christian relationships.

“And may the Lord make your love for one another and for all people grow and overflow, just as our love for you overflows” (1 Thessalonians 3:12, NLT).

You will be able to discuss the challenges that life presents to your faith.

“But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called ‘today,’ lest any one of you be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin” (Hebrews 3:13, NASB).

You will gain a foundation in your life that will enable you to reach out to others.

“It is written: ‘I believed; therefore I have spoken.’ With that same spirit of faith, we also believe and therefore speak” (2 Corinthians 4:13, NIV).

WHAT ARE THE QUALIFICATIONS FOR YOUR INVOLVEMENT IN PRACTICAL CHRISTIAN LIVING?

1. A desire to grow in your relationship with Christ.
2. A learning attitude—a willingness to be encouraged by and interact with others.
3. A commitment to attend and prepare for each session.
4. A commitment to encourage each other to complete the assignments and apply what you’re learning.

Would you prayerfully consider making this commitment to be involved?

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INTRODUCTION



You are about to embark on a discipleship series that is designed to help you experience a dynamic and supernatural walk with God. Too often we approach God only as a distant Being, too busy running the universe to be concerned about our lives. The goal of *Practical Christian Living* (PCL) is to help you know and trust God as your loving Father—the most important relationship you can have in life. The Bible stresses that, far from being a distant Being, God loves us and cares deeply about the details of our lives, and longs for our love and fellowship in return.

This PCL series is written for Christians who want to experience more intimacy and consistency in their relationship with Christ, as they rely on the power of the Holy Spirit. This “Spirit-filled life” is the solution to the challenge of living a vital Christian life in an increasingly secular society. Through studying and discussing each PCL session, you will grow in your knowledge and experience of God and biblical truth. Unlike most Bible studies, which are limited to conveying Bible knowledge, the emphasis of PCL is on applying that knowledge so that your thoughts, motives and actions will change. Furthermore, the skills and knowledge you gain are meant to be applied not only in your own life but also passed on to others.

Each session of PCL includes four approaches to learning: Scripture memory, personal preparation of the lesson, group discussion and application. All four elements work together to help you integrate the biblical truths into your life. However, the session material is only part of the spiritual growth process. Your group leader will also seek to create an environment in your meetings that includes prayer, fellowship, and sharing what God is teaching you and doing in your life. Additionally, your leader will spend some personal time with you to help you internalize the truths you are learning.

The apostle Paul’s great desire was “... that we may present every one fully mature in Christ” (Colossians 1:28 NASB 1995). Like Paul, we desire that you would grow to maturity in Christ as well. Committing yourself to PCL can be a significant step in that growth process. We commend you for taking this step.

Our prayer is that as you understand who God really is and how great His love is for you, you’ll grow to trust Him with your life and love Him more deeply as your heavenly Father.

—THE EDITORS



THE
SESSIONS

KNOWING GOD

OVERVIEW

As we begin, we will look at how God describes Himself in the Bible, what a relationship with Him means, and how knowing Him brings purpose to our lives.

◇◇ DAY ONE ◇◇

BILL'S PROBLEM

Bill, age 38, has been a successful small business owner for ten years. He trusted Christ as his Savior when he was in his late 20s, shortly after starting his company. Early in his faith journey, a Christian businessman met with Bill a few times to help him get grounded in some basic principles of Christianity.

Although Bill's friend had encouraged him to attend a Bible study, Bill's job responsibilities demanded every spare minute of his time. He bought a Bible but rarely made time to read it. He had good intentions but never made it the priority he wanted it to be. Besides, it didn't seem all that relevant to the pressures of life he was facing daily.

A year ago, Bill's company lost an investor, resulting in a loss of \$300,000. Thinking about his lifestyle, mortgage and lack of savings caused Bill many sleepless nights. Anxiety over his financial situation became a constant companion. "Why is God allowing this to happen to me?" Bill wondered. "What did I do to deserve this?" At home, fighting over money began to take its toll on the entire family. His marriage was on the rocks, and he was losing touch with his children. A friend encouraged Bill to go to church, read his Bible and get closer to God. But Bill concluded, "Where is God? He can't get me out of this situation. Does He even care?"

How would you describe Bill's view of God?

On a scale of 1 to 5, how relevant would you say knowing God is to the challenges of life?

What are the reasons for your answers?

WHY ON EARTH AM I HERE?

From the beginning of time, people have sought to answer such questions as “Who am I? Why am I here? Where am I going?” The Bible says that God created you in His image to be in relationship with Him and to know Him. That is who you are. Even when life is challenging, there is peace in knowing our purpose is to know and be loved by God.

“You didn’t create yourself, so there is no way you can tell yourself what you were created for!”

—RICK WARREN

Without knowing God, we have inadequate information about our life here on earth; the hardships of life become more difficult and confusing. To know Him is not only to have answers to the important questions of life, but also to have our deepest longings satisfied. As Augustine said, “Thou hast created us for Thyself, O Lord, and our hearts are restless until they find their rest in Thee.”

GOD’S CHARACTER

Read Psalm 145:8-21.

How does this passage describe God?

How do these verses reveal that God is personal?

Think of a current challenge you are facing. How does a relationship with God change your perspective on this challenge?

Read Isaiah 40:25-28.

What does God say about Himself in these verses?

“For what higher, more exalted and more compelling goal can there be than to know God?”

—J.I. PACKER

What was Israel’s complaint against God? What was God’s answer to their complaint? (vv.27-29)

Read Isaiah 40:10,11.

What two facets of God’s character are brought out here? How do you think He wants to relate to you?

How might these verses have encouraged Bill in our opening story?

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Psalm 139; Zephaniah 3:17.

As you read these verses, what qualities of God give you hope?

◇◇◇ DAY TWO ◇◇◇

GOD IS YOUR FATHER AND WANTS YOU TO KNOW HIM

As Christians, we now have an intimate relationship with God. We were intentionally created, redeemed, and adopted into the household of God by our heavenly Father. At our core, we are a son or daughter chosen by God to be included in His family. Often, the relationships we have with our own family can distort our view of God as Father. If our family has been difficult on earth, then we may resist the idea of being in God's heavenly family. However, God's fatherhood is one of perfection, and we know we can trust in His fatherhood over us.

Read Romans 8:15,16. (In the Aramaic language, the word "Abba" is a very personal, intimate word used only by children for their own father. It can be translated "Dear Father" or "Papa" in the most affectionate sense.)

What does this passage say about our relationship with God?

Read Matthew 7:9-11. Verse 11 tells us that our Father in heaven is exceptionally more loving than our highest expectations of an earthly father.

How would you describe an ideal father?

Read Jeremiah 9:23-24.

According to this passage, what does God desire of us?

KEY QUESTION: How does a distorted view of God as our Father affect the way we relate to Him?

FOR A DEEPER LOOK: Luke 15:11-32, Hebrews 12:4-11.

What do you learn about your Father God from these passages?

In light of these passages, how will you choose to see your difficulties and opportunities differently?

◇◇◇ DAY THREE ◇◇◇

YOU WERE CREATED TO ENJOY GOD AND HE YOU

Enjoying God and bringing Him pleasure is a foundational purpose for our lives. The Westminster Catechism says, “The chief end of man is to glorify [honor] God and enjoy Him forever.”

Read Revelation 4:11, Psalm 149:4.

Knowing that God delights in you, how does this change the way you view yourself?

Read 1 Corinthians 10:31.

What are some specific ways in which you can enjoy God and honor Him with your life?

“God’s ultimate goal for your life on earth is not comfort, but character development.”

—RICK WARREN

◇◇◇ DAY FOUR ◇◇◇

SOME BENEFITS OF KNOWING GOD

In order to grow in our love for God, it is important that we grow in our knowledge of Him too. How could we love someone we don’t even know? The following are four major benefits of knowing God:

PURPOSE: Read Acts 20:24 and Romans 8:28-29.

According to these verses, what is God’s purpose for your life?

PROVISION: Read Matthew 6:25-33.

If we make God our highest priority, what is His promise in return?

PEACE: Read Isaiah 26:3 and Matthew 11:28-30.

What does peace through Jesus mean? How do we take up his “yoke”?

POWER: Read Philippians 4:12-13.

What situations are you currently facing in which you need to experience God’s power?

KEY QUESTION: Which one of these benefits do you need most today and why?

