

EDIFYING TOWARD MATURITY

A Call to Disciple

SONS & BROTHERS



MAN OF THE WORD MANUAL • SPRING 2016

EDIFYING TOWARD MATURITY

A CALL TO DISCIPLE SONS AND BROTHERS

MCBC Man of the Word
Spring 2016

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EDIFYING TOWARD MATURITY

THEME

God equips the church through pastoral teaching to edify one another. The discipleship of sons and brothers in our assembly is an important subset of this one-another ministry. Younger men need the example and personal guidance of those who are more mature in the faith. So, let us embrace the responsibility to disciple the next generation of men!

THEME PASSAGE

“... for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; ¹³ until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.” **Ephesians 4:12-13**

TIME

10 weeks: January 31 – April 9, 2016

GOALS

1. Develop a mutually edifying relationship with my prayer partner through prayer and encouragement.
2. Equip myself with scriptural truth and practices to disciple sons and younger men.
3. Develop edifying relationships with younger men in our assembly.

EVENTS

Men's Prayer Breakfasts: January 30, March 5, April 9

MY PRAYER PARTNER (NAME, PHONE NUMBER, EMAIL):

MAN OF THE WORD PROGRAM

The leadership of Mount Calvary Baptist Church created the Man of the Word program in obedience to the command of 2 Timothy 2:2: "The things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, entrust these to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." This ministry functions under the leadership of Pastor Mark Minnick, Pastor John Tipton, and Chris Baker, elder. The following men are the current Man of the Word officers.

President	Dan Dahlhausen
Vice President	Dave Howell
Treasurer	Jeff Foster
Food Director	David Baker
Project Coordinator	Jesse Keck
Manual Director	Eric Newton

We are grateful to Pastor Mark Minnick for his encouragement and leadership and for his vision for the men of Mount Calvary Baptist Church. We would also like to express our gratitude to the men who have donated their time, energy, and gifts by writing spiritually edifying articles for our growth and encouragement.

PREFACE

Our theme last cycle and this has been *discipleship*. Last fall we focused on family worship. The goal for this cycle is to build on this emphasis of discipleship in the home and expand it. Intergenerational ministry within our assembly certainly begins in the home. A father should serve as the primary disciple-maker for his son. But transferring the faith to the next generation has broader application for our congregation as well. Younger men need the example and personal guidance of those who are more mature in the faith. Therefore, our theme this spring is *Edifying Toward Maturity: A Call to Disciple Sons and Brothers*, taken from Ephesians 4:12-13.

This booklet is a ten-week study designed to equip you with scriptural truth and practices to disciple sons and younger men and to encourage you in developing relationships that edify them toward spiritual maturity. The booklet traces the themes of Ephesians 4:12-5:16, beginning with foundational truths such as one-another ministry, spiritual maturity, and progressive sanctification. The rest of the articles consider *particular characteristics of a Christian who is growing as a new man into the likeness of our Savior* as opposed to reflecting the values and habits of the old man. Each week's resources consist of:

- SCRIPTURE READING – A passage pertaining to the week's article to be read and considered during the week (and perhaps used in family worship)
- TRUTH FOR MEDITATION – Verses from the theme passage on which to meditate (Try to pray them several days each week.)
- BOOK READING
 - Randy Stinson and Dan Dumas, *A Guide to Biblical Manhood* (SBTS Press, 2011)
- QUOTATION FOR CONSIDERATION – A motivational quote from the book reading that underscores the goals for this cycle
- M'CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE – A way to keep on track in reading through the Bible in 2016 using the M'Cheyne system
- ARTICLES – Testimonies and devotionals concerning discipleship written by Mt. Calvary Baptist Church men

Don't let these materials become daunting. Let whatever you do be a delight. If you can't keep up every component, choose the ones that you can use consistently and stick with them. At the very least, try to incorporate the week's theme into personal interaction with sons and brothers, whether that be during family worship, in conversation at home, or in fellowship with someone in our assembly.

Biblical discipleship occurs when believers build up one another in God's truth so that individual members of Christ's body grow more and more into the maturity of their Head. As men, we have an obligation to intentionally disciple the young men in our homes and in our assembly. May we embrace this calling with faith, hope, and love.

PRESIDENT'S BURDEN

Psalm 25:1 To you, O Lord, I lift up my soul.

Dear Men of Mt. Calvary:

The words "lift up my soul" are a Hebrew expression that, in other Old Testament contexts, are translated with terms such as "long," "desire," "set the heart on," "be greedy," and "count on"; thus, it is an idiom for "I direct my desire." My 18-month-old granddaughter is now following her mom all around the house copying what she is saying and doing what she is doing. She is spending her time and energies trying to be like her mother as best as she can. Do we take the time and energy necessary to direct our desires toward God and to help others do the same?

Obviously our family is primary, so in the last cycle of MOW we concentrated on promoting consistent and meaningful family worship. This cycle we are broadening the focus to reaching the men of the congregation. Younger men need the example and personal guidance of those who are more mature in the faith. This will promote an understanding between the men, guiding them in praying for each other along with opportunities for purposeful fellowship. I pray this theme will be profitable for you.

Your brother in Christ,

Dan Dahlhausen

January 31 – February 6

SCRIPTURE READING

Ephesians 4:1-24

TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“For the equipping of the saints for the work of service, **to the building up of the body of Christ**; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but **speaking the truth in love**, we are to grow up in all *aspects* into Him who is the head, *even* Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love.”

Ephesians 4:12-16

BOOK READING

Introduction, pp. 3-7

QUOTATION FOR CONSIDERATION

“In a relativistic world, men need to understand who God designed them to be, how they are prone to sin in their manhood because of the fall and how Jesus came to redeem them as men” (Stinson and Dumas, 4).

M'CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

Jan 31	Gen 32	Mark 3	Esther 8	Rom 3
Feb 1	Gen 33	Mark 4	Esther 9-10	Rom 4
Feb 2	Gen 34	Mark 5	Job 1	Rom 5
Feb 3	Gen 35-36	Mark 6	Job 2	Rom 6
Feb 4	Gen 37	Mark 7	Job 3	Rom 7
Feb 5	Gen 38	Mark 8	Job 4	Rom 8
Feb 6	Gen 39	Mark 9	Job 5	Rom 9

EDIFYING TOWARD MATURITY

ERIC NEWTON

Many of us can recall a time when our father looked us in the eyes and said, “Good job. I’m proud of you.” Those are precious moments when a son’s effort brings untainted pleasure to a father and the father knows his son well enough to notice and express undiluted approval.

The hearts of all true believers resonate with the apostle John’s inerrant words: “I have no greater joy than this, to hear of my children walking in the truth” (3 Jn. 4). What we desire more than anything else is that those following us, whether our own children or other young people in our assembly, would walk the road of truth in the footsteps of the perfect Son.

But this seems like a tall order in 2016, doesn’t it? Is it inevitable in an age of mounting cultural pressure that many young people will fall away? If not, what role can we play in guiding those younger than us in the way of truth? What direction does God’s Word provide for discipling the next generation, particularly younger men?

GOD’S GRAND PURPOSE

Church history tells us that John pastored the church in Ephesus, and it is probable that they received his third letter. Interestingly, three decades earlier this same church received a letter from Paul, in which he declares “what God the Father is doing in the church through Jesus Christ for His own glory forever.” We may often look around the world and wonder how this is possible. How could something so glorious be happening when things look so bleak? But Paul is emphatic when he writes, “That the manifold wisdom of God might now be made known through the church to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenlies” (3:10).

It is common today to use social media to provide personal updates to whomever will look and listen. Some of these *status updates* and *tweets* are interesting and occasionally even edifying. But our latest tidbit pales in comparison to what God is doing on the earth. He is magnifying His wisdom through the justification of sinners and sanctification of His church.

In other words, the message of Ephesians is timelessly relevant, providing direction for discipling all believers, including young men, toward Christian maturity. So, let's review the context.

GOD'S REVEALED PLAN

After penning three chapters of brilliant divine truth, Paul appeals to us "to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called" (4:1). Each of us is individually responsible to obey this call, but it is not simply a personal pursuit. It is a corporate responsibility. That's why our relationships and congregational unity are so important (4:3). And that's why God has gifted the church with leaders, specifically pastors-teachers (4:11). Pastors teach and preach "for the equipping of the saints, to the building up of the body of Christ" (4:12).

This is no minor matter. Paul is declaring that the point of expository exhortation isn't merely to expand our knowledge or to demonstrate oratorical skills. Preaching outfits us to edify one another. And when we serve each other through edification, the results are unity and an experiential knowledge of the Son of God. This is Christian maturity. This is growth into the fullness of who Christ is (4:13). This is what we want for our sons and brothers.

OUR DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS

God has focused His redemptive work on the church, whom He predestined for maturity—the likeness of our Lord and Savior. Therefore, discipleship has everything to do with the truth of Jesus Christ, which we are taught by spiritual leaders. But it also everything to do with interpersonal ministry. We build one another up.

How does this happen? After mentioning in verse 14 how this edification fortifies us against our susceptibility to doctrinal error (unorthodox trickery), Paul summarizes how discipleship takes place. The body of Christ grows into its Head, who is Christ, by *truthing in love* (4:15). In contrast with the clever deceit of false teachers, we build one another up by living and speaking the truth we have been taught. The instruction is critical, but we must also do something with it by faith. Discipling the next generation of young men is active and involves many members of the body; discipleship is the hands-on ministry of *edifying toward maturity*.

As we'll see in the articles to come, this maturity is quite practical. Growing into the fullness of Jesus Christ (putting on the new man) relates to all of life, which means a lot of change needs to occur (putting off the old man). What kind of change would this involve? In what areas do young men's minds need to be renewed? This transformation involves our speech, our work ethic, our self-control, our ministry to others, our love and forgiveness, our moral purity, our distinction from the world, and our eternal focus. Paul addresses all of these everyday matters in fewer than 25 verses!

What we need to realize is that our personal interaction with sons and younger brothers in the faith isn't simply a nice gesture. It is God's means of maturing them in Christ. We cannot improve God's sovereign plan. If we want to hear of our children "walking in the truth," we have to take the truth we're taught and put it into practice in a personal way with sons and brothers.

Perhaps an illustration will help. Recently, my family and I spent some time on vacation in an area with an impressive outline of bike paths. We thoroughly enjoyed exploring them together, varying our routes and the order in which we rode, stopping to delight in God's good creation. It was a very different experience than if I had merely shown my children where to ride, reviewed the regulations with them, and sent them on their way. Riding alongside made all the difference.

The dizzying rate of change in today's world threatens to pull generations apart, but the opposite must be true in our assembly. As stated in Proverbs, sons must listen to fathers. And fathers—both in the home and in the congregation—must take enough personal interest in sons and young men to speak the truth to them in love. Will we embrace this calling?

February 7 – February 13

SCRIPTURE READING

Hebrews 12:1-17

TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“So this I say, and affirm together with the Lord, that you **walk no longer just as the Gentiles also walk, in the futility of their mind**, being darkened in their understanding, excluded from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the hardness of their heart; and they, having become callous, have given themselves over to sensuality for the practice of every kind of impurity with greediness.”

Ephesians 4:17-19

BOOK READING

“Adam,” pp. 8-15

QUOTATION FOR CONSIDERATION

“A life that is consistently characterized by disorder is evidence of a general pattern of passivity in the domains God gives you to work and keep” (Stinson and Dumas, 11).

M'CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

Feb 7	Gen 40	Mark 10	Job 6	Rom 10
Feb 8	Gen 41	Mark 11	Job 7	Rom 11
Feb 9	Gen 42	Mark 12	Job 8	Rom 12
Feb 10	Gen 43	Mark 13	Job 9	Rom 13
Feb 11	Gen 44	Mark 14	Job 10	Rom 14
Feb 12	Gen 45	Mark 15	Job 11	Rom 15
Feb 13	Gen 46	Mark 16	Job 12	Rom 16

THE OBSTACLES TO SPIRITUAL MATURITY

GENE MERKLE

Mauro Prosperi, an Italian police officer and a keen endurance runner, took part in the 1994 Marathon des Sables in Morocco. Partway through the 6-day, 233-kilometer event a sandstorm caused him to lose his way. He became disoriented, ultimately traveling several hundred kilometers in the wrong direction ending up in Algeria. After 36 hours he was out of food and water. In order to survive, he took several extreme measures, including drinking the blood of bats which he caught and decapitated!

Fearing death and not wanting a long and drawn out process, Prosperi attempted suicide by slitting his wrists, but his extremely dehydrated body caused his blood to quickly coagulate, prolonging his misery. After nine days alone in the desert, he was found and taken to an Algerian military hospital where he eventually recovered. He was 186 miles (299 km) off route, and had lost 18 kg in body weight. He received a hero's welcome when he finally reached home. Prosperi entered the race again in 1998, but was halted by a severely stubbed toe. Finally in 2012, he completed it in 34 ½ hours, finishing in 131st place!

Stories of men who overcome great obstacles and eventually become victors are always thrilling to me because I imagine myself fighting their battles and winning in the end. But Prosperi's case causes me to examine myself as a Christian and whether I am strong enough, as he was, to persevere in "my race." But I am reminded that "when I am weak, He is strong," and that "I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me." Living a victorious Christian life is all about the power of God at work in the life of the believer.

My life as a Christian began when God humbly brought to my knees as a senior in college at Illinois State University. In my earnest search for Truth, God brought me to a climactic moment when I threw in the towel. I collapsed before God. There was no turning back. I surrendered all. The obstacles that have confronted me in "running my race" over the past 45 years have been many, but not unique to me. They all seem to be very common among believers.

I have had periods of *spiritual laziness* when I failed to “take heed to myself” (1 Tim. 4:16). I invariably suffered during those times. Spending time with God and His Word is always, always rewarding. My pride keeps me from *thinking rightly about my pastor*. God has convinced me to submit to my pastor’s oversight, for he “watches for my soul” (Heb. 13:17). My growth toward a more mature man is thwarted when I become *self-absorbed*. But I’m learning that my life is not “all about me.” God has gifted all believers to engage in Kingdom work. I need to let Him use my gifts to build up the body of Christ (1 Pet. 4:10). I can also become *discontent* in a hurry when I lose my spirit of gratitude for His incredible provisions. But he has never failed to meet my every need, so I have no good reason to complain (Heb. 13:5). *Unconfessed sin* (even seemingly “little” things), can quickly rob me of the joy of walking under the Spirit’s control. But I am learning to “keep the slate clean,” by confessing my sins (1 Jn. 1:9) quickly and staying filled with the Holy Spirit (Eph. 5:18). He is my source of moment-by-moment victory.

The obstacles that lie along the pilgrim pathway are too many to list here, but they tend to fall into three main categories: the world, the flesh and the devil. The world must not be loved (1 Jn. 2:15-17) and we must make no provision for the flesh (Rom. 13:14). If we submit ourselves to God and resist the devil, he will flee from us (James 4:7). Be assured that these three will always be present, threatening to obstruct, hinder, and impede our progress toward becoming mature Christian men. Thankfully, the grace of God is sufficient to meet our needs, and it is entirely possible for us to live triumphantly!

We are so privileged to know the only true God, the one who promises to “finish the work which He began” (Phil. 1:6). Therefore, “. . . let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us . . .” (Heb. 12:1).

February 14 – February 20

SCRIPTURE READING

Colossians 3

TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“But you did not learn Christ in this way, if indeed you have heard Him and have been taught in Him, just as truth is in Jesus, that, in reference to your former manner of life, you **lay aside the old self**, which is being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit, and that you **be renewed in the spirit of your mind**, and **put on the new self**, which in *the likeness of* God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth.”
Ephesians 4:20-24

BOOK READING

“Job,” pp. 16-23

QUOTATION FOR CONSIDERATION

“Adversity, after all, is what most distinctly reveals character. It reveals character. It exposes who you really are” (Stinson and Dumas, 21).

M'CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

Feb 14	Gen 47	Luke 1:1-38	Job 13	1 Cor 1
Feb 15	Gen 48	Luke 1:39-80	Job 14	1 Cor 2
Feb 16	Gen 49	Luke 2	Job 15	1 Cor 3
Feb 17	Gen 50	Luke 3	Job 16-17	1 Cor 4
Feb 18	Ex 1	Luke 4	Job 18	1 Cor 5
Feb 19	Ex 2	Luke 5	Job 19	1 Cor 6
Feb 20	Ex 3	Luke 6	Job 20	1 Cor 7

EVIDENCE OF A RENEWED MIND

MALCOLM EVANS

After being saved from a wicked lifestyle, God gave me a desire to be His disciple and to be involved in making disciples. Susan and I were blessed with two sons, so early in life we were challenged to be more dependent on the Lord for His help. The Lord taught me many things through my failures and the successes He gave me while rearing the boys.

The testimony I would like to share with you came later on in my life while I was working at BJU. I had the privilege of working with many students which was the highlight of my ministry there. The following took place a while back at the office.

Our assistant manager, “Mr. Lake,” (names have been changed to protect their privacy) informed me that “Joe,” one of our student workers had broken contract and had given very short notice. He had found another job off campus and was ready to start the following Monday morning. When he came in to the office on Friday, before he started on Monday, he received a phone call from the supervisor at the new job. He called to let him know that he would not need him after all. I could tell that he was extremely hurt and disappointed. (Joe needed the extra money for his upcoming marriage.) I immediately asked the office supervisor if I might have a few minutes to talk with Joe.

Joe agreed to talk with me. I had prayed for Joe a number of times about his decision, asking that the Lord would give me an opportunity to talk with him and wisdom to “handle the matter wisely.” I believe the Lord led me to “offer a word to the weary” just as our Savior does in our time of need (Isa. 50:4). I explained to Joe what the Scripture teaches about doing what is right—in this case, for Joe to keep his contract and trust that the Lord will provide the needed funds for his marriage (Ps. 4:5). After discussing other verses, Joe was brought to tears. I believe he was truly sorry for the decision he had made. The following paragraph is a copy of what he wrote to Mr. Lake and the office personnel as an apology for his decision:

“Dear Office Staff,

I need to apologize and ask for your forgiveness for my actions last week. Mr. Lake, I am sorry for my lack of consideration for your and the office’s scheduling needs. Mr. Evans was very kind to show me my error and I am extremely thankful to him. I was wrong to seek my own needs and neglect the responsibility I have taken on at the office. Today I was told I wasn’t needed at the new off-campus job I received this past Monday. While it hurt and did not feel good to me, Mr. Evans showed me in Scripture how I had done the same thing to you all. I was oblivious to this because I was blinded by my needs. I am sorry for what I have done. I want to do what pleases the Lord and stick to my responsibilities. I am here for whatever scheduling needs you have. That is my first responsibility and priority in any job I currently have because of the promise and responsibility I have taken in this office. Please accept my apology and know that God is working in me. I know that wherever I work, or if I work, God will provide for me and will continue to meet my needs, whether it be current needs or long term needs such as my wedding. Mr. Lake, if you will accept me back, I would like to ask for my regular shifts back. Thank you for your time and all you guys do here on campus and in our lives as students and workers for you. I truly appreciate what you do.

Sincerely...”

“Every encounter, for the believer, is
A divine appointment with the
Opportunity to display the glory
Of Jesus Christ or the risk to
Dishonor Him.”

(Anonymous)

“Be on the alert, stand firm in the faith, act like men, be strong. Let all that we do be done in love” (1 Cor. 16:13-14).

May the LORD grant us, as mature men, the grace to be on the alert to every “divine appointment”; to display love for our Savior and love for the person we encounter. May we be motivated by the prospect of laying trophies of discipleship ministry at Jesus’ feet.

MUST I GO AND EMPTY-HANDED

“Must I go, and empty-handed,”
Thus my dear Redeemer meet?
Not one day of service give Him,
Lay no trophy at His feet?

Not at death I shrink or falter,
For my Savior saves me now;
But to meet Him empty-handed,
Thought of that now clouds my brow.

Oh, the years in sinning wasted,
Could I but recall them now,
I would give them to my Savior,
To His will I’d gladly bow.

Oh, ye saints, arouse, be earnest,
Up and work while yet ’tis day;
Ere the night of death o’ertake thee,
Strive for souls while still you may.

Refrain:

“Must I go, and empty-handed?”
Must I meet my Savior so?
Not one soul with which to greet Him,
Must I empty-handed go?

Charles C. Luther, 1877

February 21 – February 27

SCRIPTURE READING

Romans 12

TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“Be angry, and *yet* **do not sin**; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.” **Ephesians 4:26-27**

BOOK READING

“David and Solomon,” pp. 24-31

QUOTATION FOR CONSIDERATION

“Like the sons of successful men who inherit their father’s hard-earned wealth, Solomon was vulnerable to softness” (Stinson and Dumas, 26).

M’CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

Feb 21	Ex 4	Luke 7	Job 21	1 Cor 8
Feb 22	Ex 5	Luke 8	Job 22	1 Cor 9
Feb 23	Ex 6	Luke 9	Job 23	1 Cor 10
Feb 24	Ex 7	Luke 10	Job 24	1 Cor 11
Feb 25	Ex 8	Luke 11	Job 25-26	1 Cor 12
Feb 26	Ex 9	Luke 12	Job 27	1 Cor 13
Feb 27	Ex 10	Luke 13	Job 28	1 Cor 14

PREPARING TO RESPOND IN PEACE

DOUG BECKER

Though many Bible commentators concede that Paul's admonition allows for *righteous* anger in response to *unrighteous* actions, it's very important to notice that he quickly reigns in that anger with commands not to allow our anger to lead into sin or to fester overnight. If you are a young man living in a family with siblings or even a dorm student living among roommates, you probably quite frequently experience provocations that could trigger an angry response on your part. For example, if a younger sister knocks over your new bicycle, causing a ding in the frame, or if a brother borrows your baseball glove (without asking) and winds up leaving it on the ball field, you probably have just cause for becoming angry. But when something like this happens, or when something even more serious confronts us, we need to obey Paul's command not to allow our reaction to lead us into sin.

The *natural* way to respond to these kinds of situations is to explode with anger like a barrel full of dynamite reacts to a lit fuse. The *Christian* way to respond is completely different. Instead of exploding like a keg of dynamite we should be able to respond without sinning. That's how I want to respond, and I'm sure you feel the same way. That leads to the question of whether there is anything we can do to prepare in advance so that we will be ready to respond in a right manner.

Recently I noticed that the second half of Romans chapter 12 gives several commands that, when followed, help prepare us to have the right kind of heart that won't be given to explosions of anger when we suffer a wrong. Notice how these commands help restrain anger from becoming sinful by producing a right heart attitude toward others:

- Love your neighbor (yes, that includes your brother or your roommate). Remember that one of the ways to love them is to make allowance for their immaturity.
- Persevere during times of tribulation. (If we are to hang in there when we are *persecuted*, what should our response be when we are only being *pestered*?)
- Bless (and don't curse) those who persecute (pester???) you.

- Don't be proud. (This is probably the main reason we wind up exploding with anger when we suffer some type of wrong).
- Don't pay back evil for evil.
- Be at peace with all men. (If it is possible and as far as it depends on you. Notice that even the Bible recognizes that it's impossible to live in peace with some people.)
- Don't seek vengeance. Leave that up to the Lord.
- Be generous to your enemies.
- Overcome evil that is done to you by doing good.

All but one of these commands involve attitudes and actions toward others—toward the very people that might incite us to anger. I am convinced that if we ask the Lord to work these attitudes and actions into the fiber of our new man we will find it much less likely to move from righteous anger to an unrighteous response. And since none of us is capable of obeying these commands in our own strength, we will need to depend upon the power of the Holy Spirit to win these victories.

The second clear command Paul gives in this verse is *Do not let the sun go down on your anger*. When we experience the kind of personal injustice that could cause anger, we should immediately seek reconciliation. We should seek to be a peacemaker. By the end of that very day should be able to lay our head down on our pillow with the matter behind us. If we don't obey this, the matter is almost certain to grow more complicated and more ugly.

I hope it will be a long time before someone wrongs you and provokes you to anger. But before that happens, let's ask the Lord to soften our hearts and produce a heart that will respond correctly to injustice. Let's ask for hearts filled with grace toward others.

February 28 – March 5

SCRIPTURE READING

2 Corinthians 8:1-15; 9:1-15

TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“He who steals must steal no longer; but rather **he must labor**, performing with his own hands what is good, **so that he will have something to share** with one who has need.”
Ephesians 4:28

BOOK READING

“David and Solomon on Sex and Sin,” pp. 32-35

QUOTATION FOR CONSIDERATION

“Don’t put a question mark where God has put a period. Flee all known sources of temptation. . . . Deploy extreme strategies to keep far from enticement. Consider the radical amputation recommended by Jesus on the Sermon on the Mount” (Stinson and Dumas, 32-33).

M’CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

Feb 28	Ex 11:1-12:21	Luke 14	Job 29	1 Cor 15
Feb 29				
Mar 1	Ex 12:22-51	Luke 15	Job 30	1 Cor 16
Mar 2	Ex 13	Luke 16	Job 31	2 Cor 1
Mar 3	Ex 14	Luke 17	Job 32	2 Cor 2
Mar 4	Ex 15	Luke 18	Job 33	2 Cor 3
Mar 5	Ex 16	Luke 19	Job 34	2 Cor 4

GIVING LIKE THE GIVER

DAVID HEIMANN

Three early episodes from my hazy memory concern fledging attempts at theft: an action figure nested in a magazine rack that I took home because it didn't seem to belong anywhere in particular; a friend's toy I thought would not be missed tucked away in my pocket; and the candy that slid across the counter of Meggie's Deli and into my pocket while the clerk's back was turned. These clumsy attempts were unsuccessful, but I practiced the dark art of acquisition by stealth. Then the memories grow more distinct and grave: my best friend in the backseat of a patrol car outside Lakeshore Mall, the sheer terror of being questioned about the missing items, the hallucinating paranoia at the sound of approaching sirens.

I knew theoretically that God did not approve of stealing, but I was heedlessly trampling down forbidden paths in a misguided pursuit of happiness. I craved things to make me happy, and to acquire them without the bother of honest labor. I craved the delicious thrill of devising clever contrivances to evade detection while boldly passing the threshold with the prize. These exploits all seemed like such rollicking good fun, but according to Paul I was an idolater being corrupted in accordance with the lusts of deceit and excluded from the eternal kingdom.

I was enticed to become a thief by covetousness, laziness, and boredom. That unholy trio that continuously preys on Adam's unhappy heirs, peddling the ancient lie of rebellious bliss, assures each generation (1) that life does in fact consist in one's possessions so get all you can even if it means bending the eighth commandment a wee bit; (2) that work is at best a necessary evil and ought to be avoided; and (3) that man's chief end is to have fun here and now. Such is the rhetoric the old self revels in. But Paul says that donning the new self entails a repudiation of the Serpent's propaganda. He turns the old self's selfish perspective on its head. "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have *something* to share with one who has need" (Eph. 4:28).

Let's consider Paul's "workology." First, he who steals must steal no longer. Second, we must labor even to the point of exhaustion. Third, we

are to perform what is *good*—we are to be like God. The telescope and microscope declare that He is no slack craftsman. He is a passionate artist and a precise engineer who doesn't cut corners. We ought to follow His example. Finally, the goal of our labor is not amassing possessions. For God's image-bearers the goal is giving. Giving ought to be the *primary* consideration in our financial planning. How much should we give? The best answer I have found is C.S. Lewis's wartime counsel: "I am afraid the only safe rule is to give more than we can spare. In other words, if our expenditure on comforts, luxuries, amusements, etc., is up to the standard common among those with the same income as our own, we are probably giving away too little. If our charities do not at all pinch or hamper us, I should say they are too small. There ought to be things we should like to do and cannot do because our charitable expenditure excludes them."¹ Now that is a radical perspective.

Giving will cost us and we must count the cost, but we must also consider that when Jesus said "it is more blessed to give than to receive," He was telling the truth. That was not the sentimental idea of a philosopher, but the sober, absolute assessment of one who knows all. And if it is more blessed to give than to receive, how much more blessed is it to give than to take! When God bids us to give, we sacrifice comfort and entertainment to gain joy. Giving imitates God. God owns all things and is by nature the Giver. We are by nature receivers, for we have nothing. But God lends to us that we might give and share His joy. When we receive, we act as men; when we give, we act as God. God has the most joy because He gives the most. He gave the best He had. This joy, this participation in God's joy is what our children must see in us and experience for themselves in order to escape the snare of stealing. It takes more than mere prohibition to fight sin's seduction; it takes promises like this one: "If you give yourself to the hungry and satisfy the desire of the afflicted, then your light will rise in darkness and your gloom *will become* like midday. And the LORD will continually guide you, and satisfy your desire in scorched places, and give strength to your bones; and you will be like a watered garden, and like a spring or water whose waters do not fail" (Isa. 58:10-11).

¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 86.

March 6 – March 12

SCRIPTURE READING

James 3

TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but **only such a word as is good for edification according to the need** *of the moment*, so that it will give grace to those who hear.” **Ephesians 4:29**

BOOK READING

“Jesus,” pp. 36-45

QUOTATION FOR CONSIDERATION

“In washing the feet of His disciples, and then giving His life on the cross, [Jesus Christ] also redefined the context of biblical manhood and leadership as sacrificial and servant-hearted” (45).

M'CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

Mar 6	Ex 17	Luke 20	Job 35	2 Cor 5
Mar 7	Ex 18	Luke 21	Job 36	2 Cor 6
Mar 8	Ex 19	Luke 22	Job 37	2 Cor 7
Mar 9	Ex 20	Luke 23	Job 38	2 Cor 8
Mar 10	Ex 21	Luke 24	Job 39	2 Cor 9
Mar 11	Ex 22	John 1	Job 40	2 Cor 10
Mar 12	Ex 23	John 2	Job 41	2 Cor 11

HOW THE NEW MAN SHOULD SPEAK

ALAN PATTERSON

People are needy. The previous verse in the context (4:28) of how the new man should act in a fallen world exhorts us to work hard so we can “have something to share with one who has **need**.” People may need food or clothing or help with unexpected financial straits. But according to the next verse, the text for this article, people also “**need**” timely help from our words. Maybe nothing reveals how well we are doing with putting on the new man than the way we use our tongue. Here Paul gives us both the negative and the positive aspects of our use of that organ that “no man can tame” (James 3:8). The fact that the tongue is so unmanageable and dangerous does not mean that we give it free rein, but rather requires that we give extra diligence to make sure we watch every word and use the tongue for good. Whereas James warns about the tongue, Paul goes further and provides instruction on how to know if it is being tamed.

Let’s consider first what we must NOT do with the tongue. James refers to the poison and bitter water that so often comes from the mouth and Paul uses a similar analogy with the word “unwholesome.” This word is also translated “corrupt” and carries meanings such as bad, decayed, or rotten. It can also mean a tree that is useless because it bears no fruit (Mat. 7:17). Practically then it refers to any words that are offensive, injurious, or useless. An example of this was brought home to me just this week. A loved one who is experiencing some dementia has fallen into using some harsh and even swear words. The loved one doesn’t seem to remember using the words, but the offensive effect was all too real as the caregiver left the home crying and determined to quit! Paul’s admonition is that not one single corrupt word should pass our lips. The grammar used suggests that the reader must stop doing something, implying that the readers have been failing to some degree. As I suggested already, the standard for believers is high. The word “all” is singular and is used negatively, so the meaning is that “not one” corrupt word should be heard from the believer.

With the standard so high and the difficulty of control so great, should we talk at all? It is true that we do better to let our words be few (Ecc. 5:2; Pr. 10:19) and to be more swift to hear than to speak (James 1:19), but God does not exhort us to silence. Rather, He admonishes us to guide our

tongues toward three goals, or three purposes for our speech.

The first goal is that the words be “good for edifying.” Simply put, the talk should build up the hearer. We build up with encouragement, and encouragement is best done when we have observed and listened well so we understand both the person and his situation. We also build up with counsel that is true, appropriate, and wanted. Words of appreciation, gratitude, and genuine interest make our “hearers” stronger and abler to grow in sanctification. Aiding the growth in holiness of others is what edification is all about.

The second goal is easy to overlook, but it is found in the phrase “according to the need of the moment.” Some translations do not directly translate the word for need, but it is the same word used at the end of v. 28 (recall the first few sentences of this article). The goal, therefore, is that our words should fit the specific need of the hearer. Remember too that silence is not necessarily the answer for our tongue problem, for this verse demonstrates that our loved ones, friends, acquaintances, and coworkers have words that they “need” to hear from us. Another possible translation would be something like “edifying where it is needed.” Sometimes, not speaking is a spiritual failure to meet the need of the moment. I remember working in a soils lab for the DOT of North Carolina and hearing my boss often use God’s name in his “corrupt” conversation. Finally, one day I had had enough and went to him and asked him in a nice way to think about what he was doing and to refrain from it. I had been saved about a year and was scared to death to approach this angry man, but amazingly he did quit using God’s name in vain, at least when I could hear it. Clearly, the need of the moment can take many forms. This may not be an example of edification, for the man was evidently not a believer, but the effect was good for all around!

When we think about what to say to build up others, the question always is what kinds of words they need to hear from us. That question brings us to the third purpose for our speech. I have changed from the word goal to purpose for a reason—the Greek text uses a purpose word here. We are to speak “so that” (that is, for the express purpose that) our words “give grace to the ones who are hearing.” This third purpose for our speech is an astounding statement. We know that God gives grace, but this text says that we too can be a means of “giving grace,” that is, a means of blessing to those with whom we are conversing. We are to speak for the purpose of conveying pleasure and profit to the hearer.

From these considerations we clearly understand that our words carry great capacity for both good and bad effect. Jesus Himself has told us about the importance of our words when He warned the Pharisees, “I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned” (Mat. 12:36-37). Do we realize that maybe better than anything else about us, our words reveal who we are, even to the extent of how we stand with God? This is serious business. So, not careless but useful and thoughtful, not corrupt but comforting and edifying, not untimely but need-sensitive and appropriate, not graceless but grace-giving and pleasant—these are the kinds of words that should proceed out of our mouths. What would those who “hear” us say about our words?

March 13 – March 19

SCRIPTURE READING

1 Corinthians 13

TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, along with all malice. **Be kind to one another**, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.”
Ephesians 4:31-32

BOOK READING

“Paul,” pp. 46-55

QUOTATION FOR CONSIDERATION

“You need self-mastery. Your leadership starts with self-control. You can’t lead others until you lead yourself” (Stinson and Dumas, 48).

M’CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

Mar 13	Ex 24	John 3	Job 42	2 Cor 12
Mar 14	Ex 25	John 4	Pro 1	2 Cor 13
Mar 15	Ex 26	John 5	Pro 2	Gal 1
Mar 16	Ex 27	John 6	Pro 3	Gal 2
Mar 17	Ex 28	John 7	Pro 4	Gal 3
Mar 18	Ex 29	John 8	Pro 5	Gal 4
Mar 19	Ex 30	John 9	Pro 6	Gal 5

KINDNESS INSTEAD OF ANGER

TYLER TROMETER

"Wash the dishes, please" was not what I expected to come out of my mother's mouth. As a college student I loved coming home to my parents' house. A break from college meant catching up with my parents, old friends, sleeping . . . sleeping more, and just relaxing a little bit after the hectic pace. I was shocked that I was just ordered to do a chore that I simply didn't like. Catching myself, I said I would do the dishes. However, as I drearily scrubbed an assortment of dishes, a revolutionary thought came to me: "One day, when I am not at a Christian college and not at home, no one will tell me what to do in my Christian life." I did not entertain this thought with rebellious joy but with sober anticipation. I thought, "If I want to be lazy, I can be; or if I get angry with wife or children then no one will correct me in some way or restrict my privileges."

"Walking in a manner worthy of the Lord" (Eph. 4:1) is our calling as Christians, but when graduating to manhood we no longer obey because of immediate reward or punishment from family or church. God's formula for change consists of throwing away old garments of sin, renewing our minds with the Word, and putting on new practices of righteousness (Eph. 4:22-24). In the following verses, the Holy Spirit focuses on several soiled garments that need to be discarded and replaced (4:25-32): falsehood, anger, stealing, foul language, grieving the Spirit, and sinful anger.

One of these sinful garments concerned me more than the others as I plunged my hands into the dish soap. The Holy Spirit seems to have anticipated a struggle to control my anger. Verse 31 explicitly describes what should be avoided: bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, slander, and just in case anything was not covered, malice. Each of the other vices described only takes a couple words like "falsehood" or "unwholesome word." But there are six specific sins prohibited that are related to anger.

Each of these words related to anger has a different emphasis. Let's take a stroll through the meaning of them. "Bitterness" literally means to have a bitter taste and refers to being resentful or envious of another. "Wrath" refers to a rage or passionate anger. "Anger," when used as an adjective in Titus 1:7, is translated as "quick-tempered." "Clamor" could also be

translated as “shout” or “outcry.” “Slander” is translated as “blasphemy” in other contexts and involves speaking evil of someone. “Malice” is a general word for all evil.

Commentators agree that this list of types of anger is climactic. In his commentary on Ephesians, Peter O'Brien describes the development in the verse as, “progressing from an inner resentful attitude, through its indignant outbursts and seething rage, to public shouting, and abusive language or cursing.”² If verse 26 gives an exception for righteous anger then verse 31 puts a very, very tight noose around what is permissible. The anger boiling inside feeds the outbursts against our friends and family. You and I need to come to terms with the idea that our being *frustrated*, *annoyed*, or *ticked off* is actually sin.

A close look verse 31 confronts us at our very core. Instead of behaving as a knight in shining armor for our families, we often perform more like the knight in crinkly khakis. But the magnitude of the problem is overshadowed by the strength of the solution and the motivation to choose the solution. The solution: showing kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. The motivation: Jesus forgave us when we did not deserve it.

The world in its major media outlets presents men in two ways. One option is that men are angry, domineering, and selfish. Option two is that men are disinterested, disconnected, and lazy. God's plan for men is different. God's ideal man shows kindness.

To replace the sinful anger that so naturally overtakes us, we are commanded to embody kindness, compassion, and forgiveness. Notice that all three of these are key characteristics of God that can be shared by man. God manifests kindness to Israel even with knowledge of their sin (Ex. 16, Manna), demands that Israel use this same kindness (Mic. 6:8; Zec. 7:9), and offers kindness to us through His Son Jesus Christ (Titus 3:4). “Tender-hearted” simply refers to being compassionate or sympathetic. This is not easy. If we really look closely at our hearts, we sometimes make a cactus look soft and inviting. So what hope do we have of accomplishing this change?

² Peter T. O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians*, The Pillar New Testament Commentary, edited by D.A. Carson (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 349.

The final grace of “forgiving each other” provides the hope and motivation for overcoming our calloused souls. In wisdom, the Holy Spirit provides a tractor-trailer worth of motivation because “God in Christ has forgiven you”! Stopping to think of the incredible work God did in Jesus Christ to forgive us provides us with all the motivation we need to forgive others. No one can ever wrong us as much as we have wronged God. Forgiving others is the opposite of bitterness and seething anger. Kindness and compassion are the opposite of open anger and quarreling. Anger is a disgusting, sinful garment that clings to us stubbornly. Let us first identify it for the wickedness that it is and then replace it with the graces that reflect the majesty and love of our Father.

March 20 – March 26

SCRIPTURE READING

Proverbs 7

TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“But immorality or any impurity or greed must not even be named among you, as is proper among saints; and *there must be no filthiness and silly talk, or coarse jesting, which are not fitting, but rather giving of thanks.* For this you know with certainty, that no immoral or impure person or covetous man, who is an idolater, has an inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience.”

Ephesians 5:3-6

BOOK READING

“A Guide for Husbands,” pp. 58-66

QUOTATION FOR CONSIDERATION

“Your orientation has to be to love people and use things—not the other way around” (Stinson and Dumas, 54).

M'CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

Mar 20	Ex 31	John 10	Pro 7	Gal 6
Mar 21	Ex 32	John 11	Pro 8	Eph 1
Mar 22	Ex 33	John 12	Pro 9	Eph 2
Mar 23	Ex 34	John 13	Pro 10	Eph 3
Mar 24	Ex 35	John 14	Pro 11	Eph 4
Mar 25	Ex 36	John 15	Pro 12	Eph 5
Mar 26	Ex 37	John 16	Pro 13	Eph 6

WISE COUNSEL FOR PURSUING PURITY

ERIC NEWTON

HIGH STAKES

Recently, a pastor in another state related to me that his congregation had been enjoying a season of spiritual blessing. However, the previous day a man in his church had been discovered in an adulterous relationship. The unbridled lust of an individual was about to have a jarring effect on the community of saints.

There are many reasons moral purity is crucial for young men. In Ephesians 5 Paul underscores a collective reason. He begins by summarizing Christian living: "Be imitators of God, as beloved children; and walk in love." To put off the old man and to clothe ourselves with the new man is to imitate God Himself. The ultimate characteristic of our Christian calling is love, because that is what Christ demonstrated in substituting Himself for us as an offering to God. And that is what lust pollutes. The fragrant aroma of a people purified by Jesus' sacrifice turns into a horrible stench when immorality or impurity or sensual greed are named among us.

It is no wonder, then, that Paul declares a zero-tolerance policy for sexual sins. Tacit approval or even apathy about these matters leavens the whole lump (1 Cor. 5:6). And the end game is disastrous. Some capitulate to the spirit of the age by speaking "empty words" that assure sexual sin is no big deal. But they are dead wrong: "because of these things the wrath of God comes upon the sons of disobedience" (Eph. 5:6). It is certain that those who do not repent of such evil will not inherit "the kingdom of Christ and God" (5:5).

WISE COUNSEL

Lust is nothing new, but the means to gratify sexual temptation have never been more readily available. How then shall we respond? How do we disciple sons and brothers for God's glory in this challenging arena? We cannot shield them from all the wiles of the devil. We cannot rid them of their flesh. (We haven't been able to discard our own, have we?) But we can arm ourselves with divine truth. We can listen to the wise instruction of those who understand young men and, even more importantly, walk

with God. In his classic book *Thoughts for Young Men*, J.C. Ryle gives some “general counsels” that are crucial for success in a world engrossed in sexual temptation.³ Let’s consider a few of them.

“Get a clear view of the evil of sin.”

If we underestimate sin, we will succumb to it. Instead, Ryle says, we must think about how Scripture describes sin, how it has radically deformed our natures, and what “misery and sorrow” it has caused on the earth. Furthermore, we can appraise sin’s evil by reflecting on God’s “cost to make atonement for sin and to provide a pardon and forgiveness for sinners.”

In his book *Tempted and Tried*, Russell Moore describes what happens when we do not have a biblical view of sin and ourselves:

You slowly grow to believe that your situation is exceptional ('I am a god'), and then you find all kinds of reasons why this technically isn't theft or envy or hatred or fornication or abuse of power or whatever ('I am able to discern good and evil'). Or you believe you are powerless before what you want ('I am an animal') and can therefore escape accountability ('I will not surely die').⁴

“Never make an intimate friend of any one who is not a friend of God.”

Ryle also focuses on the power of personal influence. Immorality and impurity seem to be private sins. But we cannot underestimate the impact of people around us. Ryle states, “Do you ask me what kind of friends you shall choose? Choose friends who will benefit your soul, friends whom you can really respect . . . friends who love the Bible and are not afraid to speak to you about it, friends such as you will not be ashamed of owning at the coming of Christ and the day of judgment.”

“Become acquainted with our Lord Jesus Christ.”

It is not enough, of course, to know the ins and outs of sin and beware of bad friends. In battle terms, moral purity requires not only defensive maneuvers but offensive ones too. And the only truly effective counter-

³ The following quotations come from *Thoughts for Young Men* (Kindle, 2011), 25-36.

⁴ *Tempted and Tried: Temptation and the Triumph of Christ* (Wheaton, Ill.: Crossway, 2011), 37.

offensive is Jesus Christ. As He stated in the Upper Room, “Without Me, you can do nothing” (Jn. 15:5). Ryle reminds young men that Jesus was once a young man too: “He knows by experience a young man’s mind. He can be touched with the feeling of your infirmities—for He suffered Himself, being tempted. Surely you will be without excuse if you turn away from such a Saviour and Friend as this.”

“Remember it is possible to be a young man and yet to serve God.”

Ryle also says, “The world is only too ready to wink at youthful sins. The world appears to think it a matter of course that young men must ‘sow their wild oats.’ The world seems to take it for granted young people must be irreligious, and that it is not possible for them to follow Christ.” What sage advice this is. These are wicked days, but that does not translate into an impossible situation. If we believe in a graciously sovereign God, there is hope. As Ryle reminds us, the circumstances of the young men Joseph and Daniel were difficult too, yet they stood strong.

“Determine as long as you live to make the Bible your guide and adviser.”

Finally, if our sons and brothers are to hope in Christ, they must treasure His Word. Sexual sin will not be conquered aside from our Bibles, for “man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God” (Mat. 4:4). Ryle advises, “Young men, give the Bible the honour due to it every day you live. Whatever you read, read that first. And beware of bad books: there are plenty in this day. Take heed what you read.”

CONCLUSION

These are sound words. If we wish to help sons and brothers have victory over the sensuality of the world and their own flesh, we must help them think rightly about sin, friends, Christ, grace, and Scripture itself. Paul’s words to the Romans are just as powerful today as they were when first written: “Put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh in regard to *its* lust” (13:14). May our assembly be one in which older men hold one another accountable to pursue purity and personally help younger men do the same.

DISTINCTIVE WITNESS TO THE WORLD WEEK 9

March 27 – April 2

SCRIPTURE READING

John 4:1-30

TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“Therefore do not be partakers with them; for you were formerly darkness, but now you are Light in the Lord; **walk as children of Light.**”

Ephesians 5:7-8

BOOK READING

“A Guide for Fathers,” pp. 67-75

QUOTATION FOR CONSIDERATION

“Give your kids the security of knowing your marriage is secure and thriving by preserving dedicated time with your wife” (Stinson and Dumas, 73).

M'CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

Mar 27	Ex 38	John 17	Pro 14	Phil 1
Mar 28	Ex 39	John 18	Pro 15	Phil 2
Mar 29	Ex 40	John 19	Pro 16	Phil 3
Mar 30	Lev 1	John 20	Pro 17	Phil 4
Mar 31	Lev 2-3	John 21	Pro 18	Col 1
Apr 1	Lev 4	Psalm 1-2	Pro 19	Col 2
Apr 2	Lev 5	Psalm 3-4	Pro 20	Col 3

QUESTIONS TO BUILD RELATIONSHIPS AND EVANGELIZE

JIM WIGINTON

When we think about evangelizing, we are always thinking about better approaches and methods. Of course, we aren't able to create spiritual fruit; we are just looking to nurture or harvest what the Lord has already begun. No pressure! We just get to watch the Lord do His great work. Here I would like to ask you to consider not a method only, but growth in grace as we are encouraged in Philippians 2:3, which says, "Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves." People are fascinating. Get to know them. Find out their stories; value their words.

Curiosity is essential and cannot be replaced in evangelism; it requires self-forgetfulness as is encouraged in the following verse: "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:4). Genuineness is necessary and cannot be faked as we relate to others. In conversations about life, especially spiritual life and eternal life, we want **dialogue**, not **monologue**. Questions that are open-ended and thought provoking are the best kinds of questions to open up a dialogue. **Not** who, what, when, where questions primarily **but** why and how questions. Of course, we do not want to overwhelm them. Ask ourselves: "What does God want me to know about this person that I do not now know?"

This approach is not personality dependent! It isn't limited to those who are gifted in evangelism. Do we care? Of course we do. Then we shouldn't let ourselves off the hook because of our perceived (or real) shyness. Caring involves curiosity!

People aren't projects, however. They are eternal souls that desperately want someone to care about them and their lives. Questions are the key to opening the door to their hearts.

80% listening, 20% talking is a good relationship ratio when we are trying to help someone. Ineffective coaches, doctors, attorneys, and counselors

are often over-talking, rarely listening. As men who know the Great Physician who can heal their souls, we need to first diagnose our friend's individual needs.

Sometimes as a business coach I may ask a potential client: "If I could magically fix any one thing about your business, what would you like that to be?" People can talk for more than hour based upon that one question! Other times I have *only* asked people a series of questions and their response is: "It is obvious you know what you are talking about!" I really hadn't said anything! People sense when you care and when you know what questions to ask. Is it possible that our evangelism, though well intentioned, is filled with too much talking and too little listening?

Let's take a moment and imagine a scenario. We are meeting someone for the first time and we would like to *love them* by sharing with the liberating truth of the gospel. What questions would we ask them after having finished the appropriate pleasantries?

Some examples (not to be in rapid fire succession, but with a calm, interested and unrushed demeanor; probably only one per each encounter):

- WHERE ARE YOU ON YOUR SPIRITUAL JOURNEY?
- DO YOU THINK ABOUT SPIRITUAL THINGS? WHAT CONCLUSIONS HAVE YOU DRAWN?
- HOW WILL GOD DECIDE WHO GETS TO SPEND ETERNITY WITH HIM?
- HOW IMPORTANT ARE SPIRITUAL THINGS TO YOU?
- IF I HAD CANCER, WAS FEARFUL ABOUT MY RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD, AND WAS GIVEN 2 YEARS TO LIVE, WHAT ADVICE WOULD YOU GIVE ME IN ORDER TO PEACEFULLY MEET GOD?
- DO YOU BELIEVE THERE IS ONE WAY OR MULTIPLE WAYS TO HEAVEN? WHY?
- WILL ALL SINCERE PEOPLE MAKE IT TO HEAVEN?

Of course, each situation requires thoughtful consideration of the person and context. For a Jew, we might consider questions like these:

- WHY DID GOD CHOOSE ABRAHAM TO BE HIS FRIEND?
- SINCE ABRAHAM LIVED PRIOR TO THE LAW BEING GIVEN, HOW COULD HE HAVE BEEN ACCEPTED BY GOD?
- HOW DO YOU HAVE YOUR SINS FORGIVEN?

- HAVE YOU KEPT ALL OF THE TEN COMMANDMENTS? WHAT HAPPENS IF SOMEONE DOESN'T?
- WHAT DO YOU REALLY THINK OF JESUS? WHY?

We are absolutely on solid footing when we ask questions. Our Lord was a frequent asker of questions. He sometimes used them to teach, to encourage, to challenge, and to cause people to reflect. Consider these questions:

- MATTHEW 16:15: "[JESUS] SAID TO THEM, 'BUT WHO DO YOU SAY THAT I AM?'"
- MARK 10:3: "[JESUS] ANSWERED THEM, 'WHAT DID MOSES COMMAND YOU?'"
- JOHN 4:35: "DO YOU NOT SAY, 'THERE ARE YET FOUR MONTHS, THEN COMES THE HARVEST?'" HE GOES ON THEN TO TEACH: "LOOK, I TELL YOU, LIFT UP YOUR EYES, AND SEE THAT THE FIELDS ARE WHITE FOR HARVEST."
- MATTHEW 6:27: "AND WHICH OF YOU BY BEING ANXIOUS CAN ADD A SINGLE HOUR TO HIS SPAN OF LIFE?"
- JOHN 11:40: "JESUS SAID TO HER, 'DID I NOT TELL YOU THAT IF YOU BELIEVED YOU WOULD SEE THE GLORY OF GOD?'"
- MATTHEW 8:26: "AND [JESUS] SAID TO THEM, 'WHY ARE YOU AFRAID, O YOU OF LITTLE FAITH?'"
- MATTHEW 7:2: "WHY DO YOU NOTICE THE SPLINTER IN YOUR BROTHER'S EYE YET FAIL TO PERCEIVE THE WOODEN BEAM IN YOUR OWN EYE?"

Reflection:

- DO I ASK THESE KINDS OF QUESTIONS REGULARLY?
- HOW CAN I BECOME MORE EFFECTIVE WITH QUESTIONS?
- WHO COULD I ASK A PROBING QUESTION TODAY?
- WHAT IS MY TALK / LISTEN RATIO IN MY CONVERSATIONS?
- HOW LONG HAS IT BEEN SINCE I PRAYED FOR AN OPPORTUNITY TO WITNESS?

An amazing effect of this sort of caring question-asking is that you will be frequently asked: well, what do you think? This is a wonderful opportunity to give the gospel to someone who is primed to listen. The very thing you have been praying for. May the Lord bless your prayers and efforts to share the greatest news ever told.

April 3 – April 9

SCRIPTURE READING

Luke 16

TRUTH FOR MEDITATION

“Therefore be careful how you walk, not as unwise men but as wise, **making the most of your time**, because the days are evil.” **Ephesians 5:15-16**

BOOK READING

“A Guide for Fathers,” pp. 78-87

QUOTATION FOR CONSIDERATION

“Home is the place where your leadership will be needed around the clock and where your vulnerabilities will be most obvious, but it’s also the place where you have the potential to bear the most fruit as you shape little hearts for eternity” (Stinson and Dumas, 79).

M’CHEYNE BIBLE READING SCHEDULE

Apr 3	Lev 6	Psalm 5-6	Pro 21	Col 4
Apr 4	Lev 7	Psalm 7-8	Pro 22	1 Thes 1
Apr 5	Lev 8	Psalm 9	Pro 23	1 Thes 2
Apr 6	Lev 9	Psalm 10	Pro 24	1 Thes 3
Apr 7	Lev 10	Psalm 11-12	Pro 25	1 Thes 4
Apr 8	Lev 11-12	Psalm 13-14	Pro 26	1 Thes 5
Apr 9	Lev 13	Psalm 15-16	Pro 27	2 Thes 1

CHOICES FOR ETERNITY

ALLEN COLLINS

Therefore, be careful how you walk...

We, as parents, sought to be careful how we walked. In discipling our sons, a great benefit was for them to see *consistency* between who we presented ourselves to be in church and who we were at home. They saw that we loved the Lord; we talked about Him and to Him; we read His Word and spent time studying it; we read books—biographies, Christian living, devotionals, theology. And we read to our sons the Bible as well as books that were appropriate to their age levels and some perhaps that may have caused them to stretch. They learned to love to read for themselves. What was practiced in our home was *consistent* with what was being preached and taught in church.

...not as unwise men but as wise...

The world in which they grew up was not friendly to the Christian and the world's attitude has not improved. As parents, we sought to counter the world's perspective with God's perspective on everything that we and they did. One of the slogans that our boys remember dad always saying is "The world celebrates the wrong people." This is because the world has a wrong worldview. But more important than recognizing this is realizing that the world is seeking to conform us and our children to its values. The world still holds these values:

- **No Rules**

- **Judges 21:25** "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes."
- **Proverbs 12:15** "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man is he who listens to counsel."

- **No Truth**

- **John 14:6** "Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father but through Me.'"
- **John 17:17** "Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth."

- **No Judging**

- **John 7:24** “Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”

As parents, we sought that our sons would not be shaped by the world around them, but rather by the Word of the God who loves us so and desires that we be conformed to His image.

...making the most of your time, because the days are evil.

The world in which we live seeks not only to eliminate rules, truth, and judgment, but also to do away with responsibility for choices that people make. In discipling our children, *we must counter the world's values.*

It was certainly our desire as Christian parents that our sons grow to be wise and not unwise. We desired that they would be in Christ and would so demonstrate that by consistency in their lives. To do so requires that right choices be made. Although we had not written these out early in their lives, I wrote this out at a time when they were in their teens. For memory purposes, I placed a series of questions pertaining to decision-making in the form of an acrostic using the word **choice**.

	SPIRITUALLY MINDED	CARNAL MINDED
C	Is this choice CONSISTENT with God's Word? We are acknowledging that God's Word is the external, objective standard of measure when we ask this question. If asked if the Bible is our standard, we would reply, "yes." But do we truly consider this question before we make a choice? This is fundamental . Our choice cannot be right/good if it is in conflict here.	Will this choice be CONVENIENT for <u>me</u> ? Rather than a concern for God's standards, I would place <u>me</u> at the center; I will make the decision. Truth is relative anyway. What would I like? Will this choice be CONVENIENT for <u>me</u>?
H	Will this choice HONOR God?	Does this choice HELP <u>me</u> ?

This question addresses our **motivation** behind the choice that we are making. Why am I making this choice? If our motive is not to honor God—to show Him respect and reverence and obedience—then we are making

choices primarily to help ourselves. Our old nature would choose those things which are self-serving.

O	In making this choice am I being OBEDIENT to what God has already revealed to me?	In making this choice will I increase OPPORTUNITIES for <u>me</u> ?
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Here, we go beyond motives to the question of personal **integrity**. Do I practice what I preach? Do I place opportunities for me which are in conflict with God's Word above being obedient to God? This is an indicator of the strength of our relationship with God. Am I faithful?

I	Will this choice INSPIRE others to follow God?	Will this choice increase <u>my</u> IMPORTANCE in the eyes of others?
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What effect will my choice have on **others**? We live in an era where people are so conditioned to think first of themselves. Rather, think first, "Will this choice **INSPIRE** others to follow the ways of God?" Paul told the Corinthians to imitate him: **1 Corinthians 11:1** *Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ* (ESV).

C	Am I allowing the Holy Spirit CONTROL in my choice?	Will this choice put <u>me</u> in a position of CONTROL ?
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Who do I have seated on the throne in my life anyway? Am I the one in control? Or do I follow the guidance of the Holy Spirit, not searing my conscience, but desiring to follow the direction and prompting of the Holy Spirit as He would guide me in agreement to the Word of God?

E	By making this choice, am I pursuing that which is EXCELLENT or merely that which is permitted?	Will this choice give <u>me</u> an EASY way out?
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Why do I make the choices that I do? Do I take the path of least resistance or do I choose a harder way that will be used by the Lord in my life to strengthen me or perhaps others in the faith?



...for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ.

EPHESIANS 4:12-13