



**STRATEGIC  
DISCIPLESHIP**  
TRAINING RESOURCES

# PHASE 4

## TEACHER MANUAL

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## SESSION 1: THE NATURE OF GOD'S RULE

### UNDERSTANDING THE CHARACTER OF GOD

**Have you ever tried bartering with God? Share stories.**

"God, if you'll do this for me, I'll do this for you."

"God, I'll never do this wrong thing again if you'll just do this one thing for me."

**Pagans believed their gods needed something from them.**

As long as your god needed something from you, you had something to barter with.

Giving your god what he needed was your way of getting what you needed.

**Spiritual economics:**

You gave: Food, Prayers, Worship, Money, Sex...

The god supposedly gave: Rain, Answered Prayers, Healing, Abundant crops....

**What is wrong with this thinking with regard to the God of the Bible?**

**The names of God reveal to us that God is not one with whom we can barter. Read the following passages and discuss how each name defeats the idea of bartering with God.**

**Exodus 3:13-15 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> Then Moses said to God, "If I come to the people of Israel and say to them, 'The God of your fathers has sent me to you,' and they ask me, 'What is his name?' what shall I say to them?" <sup>14</sup> God said to Moses, "I AM WHO I AM." And he said, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'I AM has sent me to you.'" <sup>15</sup> God also said to Moses, "Say this to the people of Israel, 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is my name forever, and thus I am to be remembered throughout all generations.

**What is the significance of the name I AM?**

- *I AM self-existent*
- *I AM self-sufficient*
- *I AM the source of all there is*
- *There is no power greater than me*
- *There is no need I cannot meet*
- *There is nothing lacking in who I AM*

**How does this name correct the spiritual bartering concept?**

*The name “I Am” communicates that God does not need anything from us, but we need everything from him. It is as if God is saying, “I don’t need you, but you need me, and I am more than enough for whatever circumstances you may face.”*

**How might this name have communicated courage and comfort to the Israelites?**

*The Israelites were slaves in Egypt with no possible way to deliver themselves. Were they even to escape, they would surely die in the vast desert. God was communicating to them that he was everything they needed to be both delivered from the power of the Egyptians and to provide for them through the wilderness.*

**Revelation 22:13 (ESV)**

*I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.*

**What was going on in the world when John records these words of Jesus?**

*Christians were experiencing extreme persecution at the hands of the Roman government and Jewish authorities. John received and recorded the revelation from Jesus while imprisoned for his faith on the Isle of Patmos.*

**How might the names “Alpha and Omega,” “the First and the Last,” and “the Beginning and the End” have given comfort to the early church believers?**

*Jesus stated that he is over all things and in control despite how the present circumstances seem to appear. He was in the beginning, and he is at the end. Everything is already worked out. He is providing a future for his people regardless of the persecution they were experiencing.*

In both the names “I AM” and “Alpha and Omega,” God conveys that he is complete in every way; perfect. God does not lack anything, and he is the source of everything we need.

**If God is complete in every way, then what can we do “for” God that will benefit him?**

*There is nothing we can do “for” God that will make his life better or more complete.*

**Consider and discuss the following statement:**

**“If God is complete in every way, then by nature, all God can do is serve others.”**

**Do you agree or disagree?**

*If God needs nothing for himself, then whatever he does is not for “his” benefit but is an expression of love to those he created.*

**Psalm 50:7-15 (ESV)**

<sup>7</sup> "Hear, O my people, and I will speak; O Israel, I will testify against you. I am God, your God. <sup>8</sup> Not for your sacrifices do I rebuke you; your burnt offerings are continually before me. <sup>9</sup> I will not accept a bull from your house or goats from your folds. <sup>10</sup> For every beast of the forest is mine, the cattle on a thousand hills. <sup>11</sup> I know all the birds of the hills, and all that moves in the field is mine. <sup>12</sup> "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine. <sup>13</sup> Do I eat the flesh of bulls or drink the blood of goats? <sup>14</sup> Offer to God a sacrifice of thanksgiving, and perform your vows to the Most High, <sup>15</sup> and call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."

**Context:** Though Israel continued to offer sacrifices, their hearts were far from God, and they lived contrary to his word.

**If God did not need sacrifices and offerings, why did he command Israel to offer them?**

*Sacrifices were always a symbolic way of appreciating the grace of God. An animal sacrifice reminded the Israelites that God provided a substitute death payment for their sins and made forgiveness possible. Other offerings were to be an expression of thanks and praise, reminding them that God was their provider in every way. If they kept offering these gifts, the hope was that they would maintain a proper perspective of their relationship with God.*

**Why did the Israelites continue to offer sacrifices if their hearts were far from him?**

*Instead of viewing the sacrifices as an expression of praise for who God was and their relationship with him, the sacrifices became an onerous burden to "appease" God. The sense of wonder and awe that sacrifices and offerings were to invoke gave way to a sense of obligation and resentment. There was a perspective that God had better be happy now that they surrendered that which had significant monetary value.*

**Have you ever found that, over time, tithing or serving in ministry became an onerous thing?**

**At these times, what perspective do you feel was lost?**

**Have you ever felt that for all the time you have "served" God in ministry, that he should be doing more for you? Have you ever felt like the Psalmist when he says, "All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence." Psalm 73:13 (ESV)**

If everything God calls us to is for “our” benefit, in what ways is that true for the following?

- Worship:** *By praising God we maintain a proper perspective of who he is and our relationship with him. When we stop worshiping God, our lives veer off in a self-centered direction, robbing us of peace, joy, and purpose.*
- Tithes:** *By tithing we acknowledge that he is the one who meets all our needs. As we trust God to meet our needs, we open the doors to receive God’s provision.*
- Ministry:** *Through ministry, we are invited to partner with God in his mission to bring people back to a relationship with him. In so doing, we draw near to Christ and experience the joy of working at his side, bearing fruit in our lives. When we walk away from what Christ is doing, we discover our lives become ineffective and unfruitful.*

**Deuteronomy 10:20 (ESV)**

You shall fear the LORD your God. You shall serve him and hold fast to him, and by his name you shall swear.

**If we cannot “serve” God because he needs nothing, then how are we to understand scriptures that call us to serve God?**

*We “serve” God by obeying his purposes for us in this world, but we need to remember that everything God calls us to do is ultimately to fulfill his desire to serve us. In the end, all that God calls us to do is for our benefit.*

*Instead of doing our service “for” God, it is perhaps better to understand God is inviting us to serve “with” him as he serves others. He is inviting us to partner with him in the wonderful task of caring for creation. He could have done it all on his own, but he has invited us to share the adventure with him.*

**Example:** *A father who allows his young son to work at his side. This is not for the Father’s benefit in getting the task done; it is to give the son joy in working alongside his dad.*

The principles to understand are:

- 1) When all your needs are met, there is nothing left for you to do other than to serve.
- 2) God invites us to serve “with” him as he serves his creation.

**What is it that hinders us from serving others?**

*Perceived or unperceived unmet needs hinder us from serving others. As we chase after meeting our own needs, we are not free to focus on meeting the needs of others.*

**What are some examples of personal “needs” we may chase after that prevents us from focusing on serving others?**

**Chasing after needs was not how it was meant to be at the beginning of creation.**

**Genesis 1:28 (ESV)**

*And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”*

**What did it mean for mankind to “subdue” and “have dominion over” the earth?**

*This was God’s way of telling us to serve creation, to care for it on God’s behalf. We were able to make this our life focus because we were created perfectly, and all our needs were met by God. There was nothing else for us to do other than serve.*

**Genesis 3:16-19 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> *To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.”*

<sup>17</sup> *And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; <sup>18</sup> thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.”*

**How did the fall affect men and women’s freedom to serve?**

**Women:** *Women would experience loss in terms of safety in relationship. As a result, women would spend much of their energy guarding themselves relationally, trying to control the relationships around them. This God-sized void in their lives would cause them to become self-focused, only free to invest in the lives of others once they felt their relational needs were met and they were relationally safe. The problem was there would never be guaranteed relational safety or fulfillment as long as God’s Spirit was absent.*

**Men:** *Men would now experience significant inadequacy in caring for this earth and even personal survival. This God-sized void would cause them to strive after performance and significance above everything else. Instead of caring for others, men would be compelled to compete with one another and come out on top. This is easily evidenced by observing a group of men watching a hockey game.*

**FEAR** and **CONTROL** become the operative words that manipulate our lives.

**In what ways do fear and the need for control reveal a broken relationship with God?**

*Fear and the need for control reveal a deep, innate distrust of God's love and provision. If we trusted God's love, all fear would fade away (1 John 4:18). If we trusted God's provision, we would not need to control or chase after anything ever again. (Philippians 4:19)*

**What are some examples of how fear or unmet needs may hinder us from serving others?**

**What do you think God wants to say to you about this?**

**Would you like to partner with God more and bear more fruit? What are the barriers you face, and how do you think God would like to deal with those barriers?**

**Are there certain types of people do you find it difficult to serve? Why?**

**What is it you need from these people, that you are not receiving, that it causes you to stand back from serving them and guard yourself?**

**What personal fears are you able to identify that you can confront this week to free you to serve others along with God?**

**Go out of your way to serve someone this week on God's behalf, and share your experience next week.**

## SESSION 2: RESTORED RULE

Share experiences of attempting to serve others “with” God in the past week.

### REVIEW:

- God is perfect and complete, and therefore cannot be served in any way.
- We were created perfectly and designed to serve with God.
- Sin distorted our ability to serve with God.

**Most of us would like to think we are servant-oriented people, but discover our pursuit of personal needs continually gets in the way. What do you think is God’s solution to our problem?**

### **Matthew 6:25-34 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> “Therefore I tell you, do not be anxious about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink, nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food, and the body more than clothing? <sup>26</sup> Look at the birds of the air: they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they? <sup>27</sup> And which of you by being anxious can add a single hour to his span of life? <sup>28</sup> And why are you anxious about clothing? Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow: they neither toil nor spin, <sup>29</sup> yet I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these. <sup>30</sup> But if God so clothes the grass of the field, which today is alive and tomorrow is thrown into the oven, will he not much more clothe you, O you of little faith? <sup>31</sup> Therefore do not be anxious, saying, ‘What shall we eat?’ or ‘What shall we drink?’ or ‘What shall we wear?’ <sup>32</sup> For the Gentiles seek after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them all. <sup>33</sup> But seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you. <sup>34</sup> “Therefore do not be anxious about tomorrow, for tomorrow will be anxious for itself. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.

### **What is the essential message Jesus was communicating?**

*Jesus was declaring that God knows your every need and is more than capable of taking care of them. Therefore, chasing after your needs is a futile exercise and a waste of time and energy.*

### **Why is the statement “pagans run after all these things” so impacting a remark to us?**

*People who do not know or trust God chase after having their needs met because there is no assurance they will be provided in any other way. Pagans (people who worship other gods and a general reference to all unbelievers) do not even trust their own gods to provide for them. They have a complete lack of faith in their gods to provide and are forced to rely solely on themselves – or to try and manipulate their gods to give them what they need.*

*When we chase after meeting our own needs, we declare that God is not faithful, God cannot provide, or that God does not care. In so doing, we denounce everything we claim to believe about God. We are no better than the pagans who do not know God.*

### **What does it mean to “seek first his kingdom and his righteousness”?**

*To seek first his kingdom and righteousness is to make the purposes and character of God our life priority. We were created to represent God’s rule in this world, not our own agendas, and Jesus called us to return to that focus.*

*When we choose to embrace God’s purposes, he promises to free us from worrying about our needs in the process. This is the wonderful news of serving “with” God; he always makes provision for the journey.*

*When we move away from God’s purposes and away from serving “with” him, we find ourselves on our own and in need. **God never created a plan for our provision apart from him and his kingdom purposes.***

**Serving with Jesus is the means by which he meets our needs.**

**When our needs are met, we are free to serve with Jesus.**

**So when should we focus on serving? Do we wait until God meets our needs and then move forward focusing on the kingdom, or do we step out in faith simply trusting he will meet our needs?**

**Have you had experiences when you weren’t sure if you should step out in faith and serve the kingdom and risk having your needs not met vs. making sure your needs were met first?**

**Jesus is inviting us to rethink our lives and get back to the original intent of serving as kingdom rulers in this world, representing God’s purposes and character. We are not to get distracted by lesser things that give us an illusion of comfort or control.**

**Matthew 20:20-24 (ESV)**

<sup>20</sup> Then the mother of the sons of Zebedee came up to him with her sons, and kneeling before him she asked him for something. <sup>21</sup> And he said to her, “What do you want?”

She said to him, “Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your kingdom.”

<sup>22</sup> Jesus answered, “You do not know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I am to drink?” They said to him, “We are able.”

<sup>23</sup> He said to them, “You will drink my cup, but to sit at my right hand and at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared by my Father.” <sup>24</sup> And when the ten heard it, they were indignant at the two brothers.

**Why did all the disciples desire to be part of Jesus’ team in the first place?**

*The disciples believed that Jesus was the prophesied Messiah who was to come and establish his eternal kingdom on earth. By being selected as part of his leadership team, there could only be a great reward for them as he established his kingdom. They would be the A-team of the new king!*

*As time progressed, they realized that their understanding of the kingdom was quite different from Jesus’. Judas was completely unimpressed as he started to see this difference being lived out in front of him.*

**Why do you think the mother of James and John requested that her sons have the seats to the left and right of Jesus?**

*These seats were considered places of special honor and authority. To occupy these seats would place them in the highest position next only to Jesus himself. What loving mother wouldn’t want this for her children?*

*But also implied in this request was a sense that such positions conveyed greater importance and honor. They perceived such positions would be ones of influence, control, and comfort. This would be the ultimate position anyone could strive for.*

**Why were the other disciples so upset with James and John?**

*The other disciples were indignant because they also wanted those positions for themselves. James and John just tried to shortcut the process and jump in line ahead of them. And to use their dear old mother in the process...who could refuse? It reveals that all the disciples were operating on the same understanding about position and prestige within the kingdom, a perspective Jesus needed to change in his future leaders.*

**Have you ever tried to gain a promotion only to have others get upset with you because it threatened their chances? Or, did you get upset with someone when they jumped in line ahead of you for a position? Share your stories.**

**Why did Jesus ask if they could drink the cup he was going to drink? What did he mean?**

*Jesus was referring to his upcoming persecution and death. He was essentially saying leadership in the kingdom is not about being served; it's about dying to self. He was asking if the disciples were willing to die in the process of serving others for the kingdom. This was in stark contrast to their motives of seeking places of honor and privilege.*

*Incidentally, each of the disciples did end up being persecuted and put to death for their faith.*

**Matthew 20:25-28 (ESV)**

*<sup>25</sup> But Jesus called them to him and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. <sup>26</sup> It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, <sup>27</sup> and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, <sup>28</sup> even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

**Discuss what Jesus meant when he said the Gentile rulers "lord it" over people.**

**"Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.  
Great men are almost always bad men."**

By John Emerich Edward Dalberg, 1st Baron Acton (1834–1902), British historian. Letter, April 3, 1887, to Bishop Mandell Creighton. *The Life and Letters of Mandell Creighton*, vol. 1, ch. 13, ed. Louise Creighton (1904).

**What do you think about the above quote? Is it true? Why or why not?**

**Why might position and power often be outlets for sin to flourish?**

**Obviously, Jesus still understood the need for the role of the leader, but what differences did he see existing between a worldly leader and a Kingdom of God leader?**

**How might you see these differences worked out in practical ways?**

In Jesus' kingdom, what ultimately should be the motivation for assuming a leadership role?

Can you think of some examples of a leader who exhibits a servant's heart? What makes that person stand out in your thoughts?

Why is serving such a high priority in God's kingdom?

What does each of the following passages teach us about the significance of serving in God's kingdom?

**Matthew 20:28 (ESV)**

*... the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.*

- *Servant leadership is rooted in the nature of God.*
- *Servant leadership places others before ourselves, even to the point of death.*
- *Servant leadership puts life into proper perspective.*

**How does serving put life into proper perspective?**

*We were created to serve, so serving restores us to our intended purpose and focus. When we fail to serve, we live out a distorted perspective on life which hinders both the effectiveness and joy of our lives.*

**John 15:13 (ESV)**

*Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends.*

*Servant leadership is rooted in a deep love for God and people. It is the ultimate fulfillment of the two greatest commands.*

**1 Peter 5:7 (ESV)**

*...casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.*

*Servant leadership is rooted in a confidence that God will meet all your needs.*

**John 15:8 (ESV)**

*By this my Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.*

- *Servant leadership bears much fruit.*
- *It is servant leadership producing fruit that is evidence of the Spirit-filled life.*

**What does it mean to bear fruit?****Colossians 2:9-10 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> *For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily,* <sup>10</sup> *and you have been filled in him, who is the head of all rule and authority.*

- *Servant leadership is rooted in an understanding you are complete in Christ.*
- *Servant leadership is ultimately Jesus' leadership being expressed through our lives.*
- *Servant leadership is extremely powerful.*

*The implications of this passage are difficult to fully conceive. We have been given the fullness of Christ/God in our lives, which is over every power and authority. We are restored to the image we were created to be with the complete power of God available to us as we represent God's rule in this world. This means that our every need is met in Christ, and we are free to serve creation with authority and power.*

**How might this passage evoke a shift in our life focus?**

**Jesus was very clear about his life mission of serving others for the kingdom of God. If our life was centered on serving others for the kingdom, how might it affect our weekly schedule?**

**How might it affect how we view our careers?**

**Where do you want to have a lasting impact for the kingdom of God? How will this benefit others?**

**If you truly focus on this goal, what changes may need to be made in your life? What lesser things may need to be stripped away?**

**God has a role for you to serve WITH him in his kingdom. Embrace it fully!**

**This week, pray about where God wants you to serve with him for the greatest kingdom impact.**

**KINGDOM RULE**

# KINGDOM RULE

## SESSION 3: RULING COURAGEOUSLY

**Why do most of us tend “not” to view ourselves as rulers?**

We are not all designed to be leaders. We do not all have the spiritual gift of leadership, and yet, as God’s “image” we are to be his representative rulers in this world.

**What do you think is the difference between being God’s representative ruler vs. being a gifted leader?**

*Leadership focuses on the specific role of leading other people to accomplish a task. Representative rule simply implies that we confidently represent God’s will, truth, love, and power wherever we go. There are many different ways we can represent God’s rule through our lives. Organizational leadership may be one expression, but it is not the only way to rule.*

**Other than Jesus, who are some biblical characters that represented God’s rule well?**

**What was it that made you think of them?**

***Examples of various ways of representing God’s rule:***

- *The blind man, in how he stood up to the Pharisees (John 9)*
- *Moses, as he stood before Pharaoh (Exodus 5-12)*
- *Esther, as she risked her life for her people (Esther)*
- *The boy who surrendered his five loaves and two fish to Jesus (John 6)*
- *Stephen preaching to a hostile crowd (Acts 7)*
- *Dorcas, who made clothes for and helped the poor (Acts 9)*

**To be a godly ruler in this world, what characteristics might you exhibit?**

**Two characteristics God emphasizes in scripture are to be “strong” and “courageous”.** (Deuteronomy 31:6, 7, 23; Joshua 1:6, 7, 9, 18; 10:25; 1 Chronicles 22:13; 28:20; 2 Chronicles 32:7)

**What does it mean to be “strong”?**

**Why would we need to be “courageous”?**

**Let's study the Joshua passage to better understand how to rule on behalf of God.**

**Joshua 1:1-11 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, the LORD said to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses' assistant, <sup>2</sup> "Moses my servant is dead. Now therefore arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the people of Israel. <sup>3</sup> Every place that the sole of your foot will tread upon I have given to you, just as I promised to Moses. <sup>4</sup> From the wilderness and this Lebanon as far as the great river, the river Euphrates, all the land of the Hittites to the Great Sea toward the going down of the sun shall be your territory. <sup>5</sup> No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life. Just as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you or forsake you.

<sup>6</sup> Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them. <sup>7</sup> Only be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go. <sup>8</sup> This Book of the Law shall not depart from your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do according to all that is written in it. For then you will make your way prosperous, and then you will have good success. <sup>9</sup> Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go."

<sup>10</sup> And Joshua commanded the officers of the people, <sup>11</sup> "Pass through the midst of the camp and command the people, 'Prepare your provisions, for within three days you are to pass over this Jordan to go in to take possession of the land that the LORD your God is giving you to possess.'"

**What is the context of this passage, and how does it impact what is written here?**

*Moses had just died, and Joshua became responsible for leading the entire Israel nation into the Promised Land. The land ahead of them was full of fortified cities and powerful people (giants), and it was an intimidating endeavor ahead of them. The Israelites had come to this place before, but fear prevented them from entering the land. As a result, they were banished to wander in the wilderness for forty years until all those who rebelled had died.*

*The Israelites were a very fickle group of people, constantly rebelling against God and his appointed leadership. This led to many times when God would bring judgment against them in an attempt to turn their hearts back to him.*

*All this is to say, Joshua must have been a little intimidated by the responsibility placed into his hands.*

**What principle is God communicating to Joshua (and us) in the first paragraph?**

*Example: God will give you success at whatever he calls you to do.*

In the second paragraph, God tells Joshua to be “strong and courageous” three times. Whenever you see a repetition in scripture, stop to take notice of what is being emphasized.

There are three reasons why Joshua should be “strong and courageous.” Find the principle behind each repetition.

**1:6** *Be strong and courageous, for you shall cause this people to inherit the land that I swore to their fathers to give them.*

**Principle:** *You will successfully accomplish what I command you to do.*

**How would this statement give confidence to Joshua?**

**How might this statement give confidence to us as we rule on God’s behalf?**

**Are there any examples of a time when you were called by God to step out in faith and you simply had to trust he would give you success?**

**Were there times when God called you to do something but fear and insecurity held you back?**

**1:7** *Be strong and very courageous, being careful to do according to all the law that Moses my servant commanded you. Do not turn from it to the right hand or to the left, that you may have good success wherever you go.*

**Principle:** *Success is dependent upon staying true to God’s word.*

**How would following scripture help Joshua be prosperous and successful in leading the Israelites to claim the land?**

The word “prosperous” in Hebrew (tsalach) means: to make progress, advance, succeed in your goals

*Success ultimately comes from being aligned with God and his purposes. To follow the Law means that we are walking in relationship with God, as opposed to away from him in sinful rebellion. The Law showed the Israelites how to represent God's design for life in contrast to the destructive approach of the pagan nations around them. To break away from God's character and leading would be to miss the blessing he had prepared for them.*

*God's laws work on the practical level. If the Israelites followed God's laws, then they would learn how to live at peace with God and each other. Every law given by God was an expression of love and righteousness that would provide them with wisdom to navigate every decision they would need to make. Being in sync with God and his mission opens the floodgates of blessing to be poured into our lives (not necessarily wealth and health prosperity, but blessing to accomplish his purposes with peace, joy, and fruitfulness).*

**Success, for Joshua, meant keeping the Israelites focused on God and their mission to take possession of the land and represent his rule.**

**How does the world define success today?**

**As you practically look at your own life, how have you been defining success?**

**What should be our definition of success?**

*Success for us today is still to accomplish the purposes God sets before us. Where worldly success focuses on building one's own kingdom, Godly success focuses on faithfully doing whatever God calls us to do.*

*The mission he has given us as his church is to make disciples as we go through this world. Whatever "personal mission" God calls us to, it will reflect and help the church accomplish this greater mission in some way.*

**How does following God's word today pave the way for our success?**

*If success means accomplishing God's purposes, we can only do that by embracing God's character and leading. Remember, our primary purpose is to be in a relationship with God and represent him to the world. If we are not abiding by God's Word, we are neither embracing him nor representing his purposes to the world.*

If following God's word is a key to success and prosperity, why do we spend such little time studying it? Why do you think we are content to do a little "devotional" reading but not spend time deeply probing scripture?

1:9 **Be strong and courageous.** *Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.*

**Principle:** *God is with you every step of the way; there is nothing to fear.*

How might these words of encouragement have stripped fear and terror away from Joshua?

**Romans 8:31 (ESV)**

*If God is for us, who can be against us?*

If this is true, why do we still limit our lives with fear and personal insecurity?

If this is true, why do we get discouraged in ministry?

Sometimes it is easy to lose perspective as to WHY we do ministry? Give an example of when you have lost sight of why you serve in the way you do?

In those times, what became your focus?

Do you think our church is characterized by people who are "strong and courageous"? Why or why not?

**How can we cultivate this perspective in our lives and our church?**

**Zechariah 4:6 (NIV)**

*“Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,” says the Lord Almighty.*

**What are the implications of this passage?**

*Our success is not dependent on our ability but the power of God. Our responsibility is to be faithful and obedient, leaving the results to him.*

**If God is the one who creates the results anyway, why does he call us to rule?**

*God invites us to partner with him in his act of ruling. He is still the “ruler,” but he gives us the privilege of representing his rule to the rest of creation. In this way, we are included in the divine activity of the godhead. We are raised above the rest of creation to be its caretakers.*

**What room will there be for timidity and insecurity in the kingdom of God? What do these traits indicate about our belief in God?**

*These traits imply that we do not believe God is in control and working through us. As a result, we fear failure and the opinions of others. We then shy away from the incredible joy God sets before us to rule with him; we shy away and fail to accomplish the great things God has in store for us. When we fail to rule, God’s character and purposes are not represented to the rest of creation, and we stay trapped in feelings of inadequacy and insignificance.*

## **GOD SAYS: BE STRONG AND COURAGEOUS**

**Is there something you have been putting off but now know you need to do because God is with you and has called you to the task?**

**If you embrace these words fully, how might they change your week?**

**Is there a way you can serve others this week that may require a step of faith?**

## SESSION 4: RULING STRATEGICALLY

Have you ever been really busy but sensed you weren't making any headway in life?  
How is that possible?

It is possible for churches to invest many hours of volunteer labor, spend large amounts of money and run many programs, yet not make any significant impact in advancing the Kingdom of God. How is this possible?

Kingdom impact usually occurs when we **INTENTIONALLY** and **STRATEGICALLY** choose to make a specific difference in an area of kingdom life.

What do we mean by the following words?

**Intentional:**

*Being intentional means that we are consciously and purposefully planning to impact a specific way in God's kingdom.*

**Strategic:**

*Being strategic means, we have carefully thought through "how" we are going to create that impact. It means we have considered the steps needed to move forward effectively and have anticipated the obstacles preventing us from accomplishing our goal.*

What are some general life goals you've strategized for in the past year?

*Purchases, Vacation, Work, Exercise, etc.*

Why are we motivated to strategize for these things but less so for the kingdom?

**1 Corinthians 3:10-15 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. <sup>11</sup> For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. <sup>12</sup> Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— <sup>13</sup> each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. <sup>14</sup> If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. <sup>15</sup> If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire.

**What are some implications of the above passage?**

**We are all busy. We all have too much to do, and we all have things not getting done.**

**Why should we add strategic kingdom planning to our lives?**

- *Serving God's kingdom is why we are here. It's our life purpose. All else we do are "things" we add to our lives to support us "as" we do kingdom work – jobs, eating, sleeping. Unfortunately, we add so many other non-essentials to our lives that our one true mission often gets crowded out.*
- *We want to partner with God in making an eternal difference.*
- *We want to joyfully show Christ the work of our hands when we stand before him.*
- *God will hold us accountable for how we used our time and resources for his glory and purposes.*

**What are some non-essential things we add to our lives that crowd out the mission God has for us?**

**Are you presently serving in a way that the Kingdom of God is experiencing the best you have to offer?** (Keep in mind that at different stages of life, we have different capacities of time and energy)

## **STRATEGIZING KINGDOM IMPACT:**

**Read the passages below and consider what is needed to have an impact in the kingdom.**

***Nehemiah 2:1-4 (ESV)***

*<sup>1</sup> In the month of Nisan, in the twentieth year of King Artaxerxes, when wine was before him, I took up the wine and gave it to the king. Now I had not been sad in his presence. <sup>2</sup> And the king said to me, "Why is your face sad, seeing you are not sick? This is nothing but sadness of the heart." Then I was very much afraid. <sup>3</sup> I said to the king, "Let the king live forever! Why should not my face be sad, when the city, the place of my fathers' graves, lies in ruins, and its gates have been destroyed by fire?" <sup>4</sup> Then the king said to me, "What are you requesting?" So I prayed to the God of heaven.*

**1. Know what you want to accomplish**

**What either grieves you or excites you regarding the kingdom of God that compels you to want to do something about it?**

*Some may say nothing excites or burdens them. If this is the case, they do not see the world through God's eyes. So many people are hurting, lost, focused in the wrong directions, and under judgment. We have a hope they desperately need to hear and experience. One will not resonate with this burden if they have become self-focused and have placed protective walls around their lives or have not spent time asking God to share his heart passion with them.*

*Some may say they have too many areas of interest. This is similar to a business trying to diversify their product too much and eventually sell nothing effectively. These people need to consider how they truly want to impact the kingdom and significantly impact at least one area. Or, their goal may be to be a support to many ministries.*

**What is so significant about the king's question to Nehemiah in 2:4?**

*The king's question was an intensely practical one. Nehemiah shared his concern, and now he needed to consider what he would do about it. We can easily complain about how things are not the way we want them to be but are we really willing to make a difference?*

*The king's question demanded a specific response from Nehemiah. Whatever response Nehemiah gave the king needed to involve a clear and concise answer and plan of action.*

**Are you able to clearly state what you want to do about a kingdom burden you have?**

**Nehemiah 2:4-5 (ESV)**

<sup>4</sup> Then the king said to me, "What are you requesting?" So I prayed to the God of heaven. <sup>5</sup> And I said to the king, "If it pleases the king, and if your servant has found favor in your sight, that you send me to Judah, to the city of my fathers' graves, that I may rebuild it."

**2. Pray**

**What do you think Nehemiah prayed for?**

**Nehemiah prayed before every step of the way.**

***Nehemiah 4:7-9 (ESV)***

*7 But when Sanballat and Tobiah and the Arabs and the Ammonites and the Ashdodites heard that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem was going forward and that the breaches were beginning to be closed, they were very angry. 8 And they all plotted together to come and fight against Jerusalem and to cause confusion in it. 9 And we prayed to our God and set a guard as a protection against them day and night.*

**Look closely at 4:9. How do prayer and strategic planning work together?**

*Prayer is the precursor to strategic planning. When we come to God in prayer, it does not abdicate our responsibility as rulers to act; it aligns us with God and his purposes so that we are open to receiving his wisdom in HOW to act.*

**Prayer is always the starting point for determining God's purposes and how to accomplish them.**

***Nehemiah 2:11-16 (ESV)***

*11 So I went to Jerusalem and was there three days. 12 Then I arose in the night, I and a few men with me. And I told no one what my God had put into my heart to do for Jerusalem. There was no animal with me but the one on which I rode. 13 I went out by night by the Valley Gate to the Dragon Spring and to the Dung Gate, and I inspected the walls of Jerusalem that were broken down and its gates that had been destroyed by fire. 14 Then I went on to the Fountain Gate and to the King's Pool, but there was no room for the animal that was under me to pass. 15 Then I went up in the night by the valley and inspected the wall, and I turned back and entered by the Valley Gate, and so returned. 16 And the officials did not know where I had gone or what I was doing, and I had not yet told the Jews, the priests, the nobles, the officials, and the rest who were to do the work.*

**3. Create a plan that considers all *the potential obstacles***

**Why do you think Nehemiah went out during the night to inspect the broken-down walls and gates, and why did he keep his intentions secret?**

*The task of rebuilding the walls and gates of Jerusalem, was massive. It would have been quickly scoffed and rejected by the people of Jerusalem, and have created opposition before it even began. By quietly inspecting the walls, Nehemiah was able to form a practical plan of action that would make the job appear doable to the people.*

**Have you ever shared an idea with someone only to have it shot down because you weren't able to clearly communicate how you could accomplish the task? Share your experience.**

**What are some examples of creative ideas that you had that have come and gone because there was no plan to make it happen?**

**Acts 16:6-10 (ESV)**

*<sup>6</sup> And they went through the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to speak the word in Asia. <sup>7</sup> And when they had come up to Mysia, they attempted to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus did not allow them. <sup>8</sup> So, passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas. <sup>9</sup> And a vision appeared to Paul in the night: a man of Macedonia was standing there, urging him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” <sup>10</sup> And when Paul had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go on into Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.*

**What can we learn from Paul’s experience about our “plans”?**

*Our plans are always subject to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Paul prayerfully considered where he should go to preach the gospel, but there were times God had a different plan. The good news is that if God has a different plan, he will let you know as long as you are willing to listen.*

**2 Corinthians 11:23-28 (ESV)**

*<sup>23</sup> Are they servants of Christ? I am a better one—I am talking like a madman—with far greater labors, far more imprisonments, with countless beatings, and often near death. <sup>24</sup> Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. <sup>25</sup> Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I was shipwrecked; a night and a day I was adrift at sea; <sup>26</sup> on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, danger from robbers, danger from my own people, danger from Gentiles, danger in the city, danger in the wilderness, danger at sea, danger from false brothers; <sup>27</sup> in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst, often without food, in cold and exposure. <sup>28</sup> And, apart from other things, there is the daily pressure on me of my anxiety for all the churches.*

**What can we learn from Paul about fulfilling God’s mission for your life?**

**4. Persevere**

*The task God calls you to will not necessarily be easy. Quite the contrary, it will challenge your faith and your commitment to the end result. The mission, for Paul, was so important he was willing to surrender his comforts, his schedule, his money, and even his life to ensure Gentiles could hear about Jesus Christ.*

**How important is the ministry that you are presently doing? Is it worth giving everything for? Is it part of a greater picture?**

Have you ever had people discourage you from spending time serving in the kingdom? How did you handle that?

What might it cost you to accomplish your ministry goal? Is it a price you are willing to pay?

**Colossians 3:23-24 (ESV)**

<sup>23</sup> Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, <sup>24</sup> knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

**5. Give it your ALL**

**Does ministry sometimes become a mundane thing that you end up giving a half-hearted effort? Why is that?**

*It is easy to lose sight of why we do what we do.*

The first week of setting up chairs for a new church can seem like an exciting thing as you envision people coming and filling those chairs. Several years later, it can feel like a menial task that you are doing because “somebody” has to do it, and no one else volunteered.

**How can we keep from developing this type of mindset?**

- *We have to view the task as an essential part of accomplishing the overall goal. Seeing the task as God sees the task will help clarify the value of how we are serving.*
- *Whatever we do, we have the opportunity of doing it personally for Jesus. No task, when done with that mindset, is menial or insignificant. It is for our Lord and Saviour, who is on a great mission to rescue people into his kingdom. Whatever role we play, if it is for him, it is significant and brings with it a great reward.*

**Does lack of affirmation or praise from others sometimes cause you to question why you should continue in your ministry?**

**If you were to carry out your present ministry fully for God’s glory, how might that change your approach?**

**2 Timothy 4:6-8 (ESV)**

*<sup>6</sup> For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. <sup>7</sup> I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. <sup>8</sup> Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, will award to me on that Day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.*

**Acts 13:36 (ESV)**

*For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep and was laid with his fathers...*

**What cause are you fighting for? What mission are you on?**

**At what point will you be able to say you completed the task?**

**It will be an exciting time to stand before Jesus and declare that we have built into his kingdom with all our heart and strength.**

# KINGDOM RULE

## SESSION 1: CHURCH OFFICES

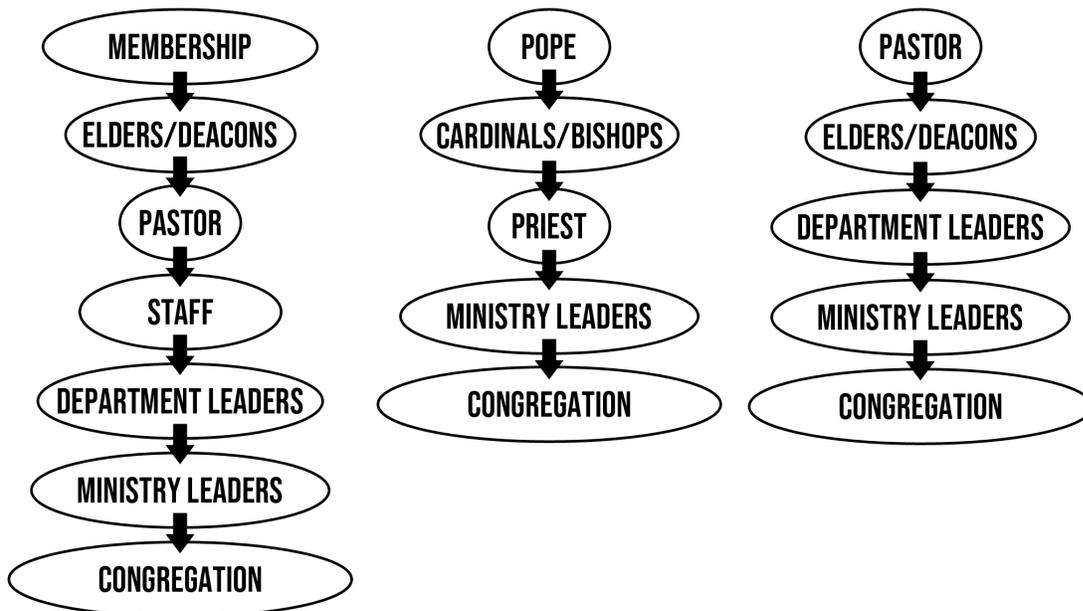
If the church is to be a spiritual family, why would it need a leadership structure?

Do you know the church leadership structure of your church?

Can you sketch your church's governance structure? What is the flow of authority?

(Implied in each structure is the understanding that Christ is to be ultimately over everything)

*Teachers Note:* Below are some samples of various church governance structures. The students do not have these charts. Determine what your church structure is before you teach this lesson. A model typically shows the flow of authority within a church. You might want to do this together as a group. You only need to draw your church's model, not all the examples.



If you were to design a leadership structure for a new church, what structure/model would you use?

Organizational structure in the early church was constantly evolving as the church grew and needed varying levels of support and oversight. Though some leadership offices are mentioned in scripture, there are no specific statements as to what governance structure the church should follow. Why do you think this is?

**What are the various church offices mentioned in scripture?**

1. Presbuteros: *Elder*
2. Poimen: *Shepherd*
3. Episkopos: *Overseer*
4. Diakonos: *Servant/Deacon*

*Note: The word “pastor” does not technically occur in the Bible as a separate office. The only place it is used is in Ephesians 4:11, translated from the word poimen. In every other passage in the Bible, poimen is translated as shepherd. If you use the word “pastor,” remember it is synonymous with “shepherd” as you read the passages below.*

**What insights do you gain from the following passages with regard to how these titles relate to one another?****Acts 20:17-18, 28 (NASB)**

<sup>17</sup> And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus and called to him the elders of the church <sup>18</sup> And when they had come to him, he said to them...

<sup>28</sup> Be on guard for yourselves and for all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.

**Titus 1:5-9 (NASB)**

<sup>5</sup> For this reason I left you in Crete, that you might set in order what remains, and appoint elders in every city as I directed you, <sup>6</sup> namely, if any man be above reproach, the husband of one wife, having children who believe, not accused of dissipation or rebellion. <sup>7</sup> For the overseer must be above reproach as God’s steward, not self-willed, not quick-tempered, not addicted to wine, not pugnacious, not fond of sordid gain,

**1 Peter 5:1-4 (NASB)**

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a partaker also of the glory that is to be revealed, <sup>2</sup> shepherd the flock of God among you, exercising oversight not under compulsion, but voluntarily, according to the will of God; and not for sordid gain, but with eagerness; <sup>3</sup> nor yet as lording it over those allotted to your charge, but proving to be examples to the flock. <sup>4</sup> And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the unfading crown of glory.

*It appears as though these three terms of elder, shepherd, and overseer are used interchangeably, and all refer to one specific role of leader within the church.*

For convenience, through the rest of this study, we will use the term “elder” in reference to the position of the leader responsible for overseeing the church.

## ELDERS

How would you define the role of the elder? What is his job description?

From the following passages, summarize some of the responsibilities of an elder.

### **Acts 15:1-2 (ESV)**

*<sup>1</sup> But some men came down from Judea and were teaching the brothers, “Unless you are circumcised according to the custom of Moses, you cannot be saved.” <sup>2</sup> And after Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and debate with them, Paul and Barnabas and some of the others were appointed to go up to Jerusalem to the apostles and the elders about this question.*

- *Wise counsel*
- *Theological discernment*

### **Acts 20:28 (ESV)**

*Pay careful attention to yourselves and to all the flock, in which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to care for the church of God, which he obtained with his own blood.*

- *Watch/Guard the church*

### **1 Timothy 4:14 (ESV)**

*Do not neglect the gift you have, which was given you by prophecy when the council of elders laid their hands on you.*

- *Lay hands on people commissioning them for ministry*

### **1 Timothy 5:17 (ESV)**

*Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching.*

- *Direct the affairs of the church*
- *Some are to preach/teach*

**James 5:14-15 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> Is anyone among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord. <sup>15</sup> And the prayer of faith will save the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up. And if he has committed sins, he will be forgiven.

- Anoint with oil and pray for people

**1 Peter 5:2 (ESV)**

...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly...

- Shepherd the church (lead, provide)

**Look at the following passages to determine the biblical qualifications for an elder.**

**1 Timothy 3:1-7 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> The saying is trustworthy: If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task. <sup>2</sup> Therefore an overseer must be above reproach, the husband of one wife, sober-minded, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, <sup>3</sup> not a drunkard, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money. <sup>4</sup> He must manage his own household well, with all dignity keeping his children submissive, <sup>5</sup> for if someone does not know how to manage his own household, how will he care for God's church? <sup>6</sup> He must not be a recent convert, or he may become puffed up with conceit and fall into the condemnation of the devil. <sup>7</sup> Moreover, he must be well thought of by outsiders, so that he may not fall into disgrace, into a snare of the devil.

**Titus 1:6-9 (ESV)**

<sup>6</sup> ...if anyone is above reproach, the husband of one wife, and his children are believers and not open to the charge of debauchery or insubordination. <sup>7</sup> For an overseer, as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be arrogant or quick-tempered or a drunkard or violent or greedy for gain, <sup>8</sup> but hospitable, a lover of good, self-controlled, upright, holy, and disciplined. <sup>9</sup> He must hold firm to the trustworthy word as taught, so that he may be able to give instruction in sound doctrine and also to rebuke those who contradict it.

**Write the elder qualifications from each passage in the table below. Place similar statements from the passages beside each other to make it easier to see any unique qualifications.**

1 Timothy 3:1-7	Titus 1:6-9
<i>Above reproach</i>	<i>Above reproach</i>
<i>Husband of one wife</i>	<i>Husband of one wife</i>
<i>Sober-minded</i>	<i>Not debauchery or insubordination</i>
<i>Self-controlled</i>	<i>Self-controlled</i>
<i>Respectable</i>	
<i>Hospitable</i>	<i>Hospitable</i>
<i>Able to Teach</i>	
<i>Not a drunkard</i>	<i>Not a drunkard</i>
<i>Not violent – Gentle</i>	<i>Not violent</i>
<i>Not quarrelsome</i>	
<i>Not a lover of money</i>	<i>Not greedy for gain</i>
<i>Manages his family well</i>	
<i>Not a recent convert</i>	
<i>Good reputation with un-churched</i>	
	<i>Children are believers</i>
	<i>Not arrogant</i>
	<i>Not quick-tempered</i>
	<i>Lover of good</i>
	<i>Upright</i>
	<i>Holy</i>
	<i>Disciplined</i>
	<i>Hold firm to the Word</i>

**How would you summarize what you would look for in an elder over your church?**

## **DEACONS**

### **1 Timothy 3:8-13 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> Deacons likewise must be dignified, not double-tongued, not addicted to much wine, not greedy for dishonest gain. <sup>9</sup> They must hold the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. <sup>10</sup> And let them also be tested first; then let them serve as deacons if they prove themselves blameless.

<sup>11</sup> Their wives likewise must be dignified, not slanderers, but sober-minded, faithful in all things.

<sup>12</sup> Let deacons each be the husband of one wife, managing their children and their own households well. <sup>13</sup> For those who serve well as deacons gain a good standing for themselves and also great confidence in the faith that is in Christ Jesus.

Write the qualifications for a deacon in the space below.

Deacons
<i>Dignified</i>
<i>Not double-tongued</i>
<i>Not addicted to much wine</i>
<i>Not greedy for dishonest gain</i>
<i>Clear conscience</i>
<i>Tested</i>
<i>Husband of one wife</i>
<i>Manages children and household well</i>
Deacon's Wives
<i>Dignified</i>
<i>Not slanderers</i>
<i>Sober-minded</i>
<i>Faithful in all things</i>

**What do you think are the differences between the function of an elder and a deacon?**

*Scripture does not give us much insight into the practical function of these roles other than Elders are responsible for the big picture of the church. The term deacon (servant) seems to imply a more hands-on role, overseeing the specific ministries of the church. Deacons were not simply custodians or property managers but spiritual ministry leaders.*

**1 Timothy 5:22 (ESV)**

*Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, nor take part in the sins of others; keep yourself pure.*

**Paul gave Timothy the responsibility of appointing leadership in the church, yet he also told him not to be too hasty in doing so. Why do you think this is the case?**

**Why are the roles of Elder and Deacon (or whatever name one gives them) so important to the church?**

**These can be weighty roles, carrying much responsibility. Is there some practical way you can encourage the Elders in your church this week?**

## SESSION 2: LEADERSHIP MINISTRIES

In addition to the offices of elder and deacon, Paul also highlights specific ministries that God has given to the church through spiritually empowered people.

### **Ephesians 4:11-13 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, <sup>13</sup> until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ...

### **What is the difference between the role of Elder and these specific ministry people?**

*Any of these people could possibly fill the role of elder. The main distinction is that the role of an elder is an “office,” which assumes oversight over all ministries of a local church. The roles Paul mentions in the above passage are ministries by spiritual people with specific areas of impact. In some cases, these ministries may have a broader impact beyond that of a single, local church. The ultimate role of these ministries is to equip believers for ministry.*

### **What specific ministry impact does each of these roles have?**

*Teacher’s Note: People apply different definitions to some of these roles. If your church has a different slant, you will simply need to incorporate that into your teaching.*

## APOSTLE

*The word “apostle” literally means “one sent with a message”.*

### **Acts 14:14 (ESV)**

*But when the apostles Barnabas and Paul heard of it, they tore their garments and rushed out into the crowd, crying out...*

### **Galatians 1:19 (ESV)**

*But I saw none of the other apostles except James the Lord’s brother.  
(Not one of the 12)*

### **1 Corinthians 15:3-7 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>4</sup> that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the Scriptures, <sup>5</sup> and that he appeared to Cephas, then to the twelve. <sup>6</sup> Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep. <sup>7</sup> Then he appeared to James, then to all the apostles.

Obviously, the role of “apostle” was not restricted to the twelve Apostles.

What do you think is the role of an apostle?

Read the following passages and discuss some of the responsibilities of an apostle.

**Acts 6:1-4 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now in these days when the disciples were increasing in number, a complaint by the Hellenists arose against the Hebrews because their widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

<sup>2</sup> And the twelve summoned the full number of the disciples and said, “It is not right that we should give up preaching the word of God to serve tables. <sup>3</sup> Therefore, brothers, pick out from among you seven men of good repute, full of the Spirit and of wisdom, whom we will appoint to this duty. <sup>4</sup> But we will devote ourselves to prayer and to the ministry of the word.”

- *Prayer and preaching*

**Romans 15:20 (ESV)**

...and thus I make it my ambition to preach the gospel, not where Christ has already been named, lest I build on someone else’s foundation...

- *Advance the kingdom and plant new churches*

**Titus 1:5 (ESV)**

This is why I left you in Crete, so that you might put what remained into order, and appoint elders in every town as I directed you...

- *Establish leadership in new churches*

**Galatians 2:8 (ESV)**

...for he who worked through Peter for his apostolic ministry to the circumcised worked also through me for mine to the Gentiles...

- *Provide oversight for specific groups of churches*

**1 Timothy 1:3 (ESV)**

As I urged you when I was going to Macedonia, remain at Ephesus so that you may charge certain persons not to teach any different doctrine...

- *Teach and defend doctrine*

**1 Corinthians 5:1-5 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. <sup>2</sup> And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. <sup>3</sup> For though absent in body, I am present in spirit; and as if present, I have already pronounced judgment on the one who did such a thing. <sup>4</sup> When you are assembled in the name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, <sup>5</sup> you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord.

- *Oversee church discipline among congregations*

**SUMMARY:** *The role of the apostle appears to be that of assuming spiritual oversight over a collection of churches. Peter assumed responsibility for the Jewish churches and Paul for the Gentiles. Some of the other twelve went to distant lands to oversee the spread of the gospel and the establishment of churches abroad.*

*The responsibility of an apostle is to safeguard theology, guard the church, facilitate unity within the broader body and encourage the advancement of the gospel.*

**The role of apostle is not clearly understood in our present culture. Are there any people you can identify as fulfilling the role of apostle today?**

*The role of an apostle is not so much an office, such as a denominational district supervisor, but a spiritually gifted role where a person cares for or builds up a collection of churches. They have ongoing spiritual influence that is accepted and valued by the individual churches under their care. It is a situation where the churches view this person as a spiritual father (1 Cor 4:14).*

**Why do you think the role of apostle is so important in scripture?**

**What might we miss by not having an apostle's influence over the local church?**

- *Churches may not be unified with one another.*
- *Churches may lack encouragement and strengthening from an outside source.*
- *Churches may lack perspective in their mission to keep reaching out into the world.*
- *Churches may start to diverge from sound doctrine.*
- *Churches may not effectively confront sin.*

## PROPHET

**What is a prophet?**

**What is the role of a prophet?**

**Read the following passages and discuss some of the responsibilities of a prophet.**

**Deuteronomy 18:18 (ESV)**

*I will raise up for them a prophet like you from among their brothers. And I will put my words in his mouth, and he shall speak to them all that I command him.*

- *A prophet communicates a specific message from God*

**2 Chronicles 24:19 (ESV)**

*Yet he sent prophets among them to bring them back to the LORD. These testified against them, but they would not pay attention.*

- *A prophet calls people to repent of sin and turn back to God*

**Acts 11:27-28 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> Now in these days prophets came down from Jerusalem to Antioch. <sup>28</sup> And one of them named Agabus stood up and foretold by the Spirit that there would be a great famine over all the world (this took place in the days of Claudius).

**Acts 21:10-11 (ESV)**

<sup>10</sup> While we were staying for many days, a prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. <sup>11</sup> And coming to us, he took Paul's belt and bound his own feet and hands and said, "Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'This is how the Jews at Jerusalem will bind the man who owns this belt and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.'"

- *A prophet proclaims what God wants to reveal regarding the future so the church can be prepared.*

## How can you know if a prophet is trustworthy?

### **Deuteronomy 18:21-22 (ESV)**

<sup>21</sup> And if you say in your heart, 'How may we know the word that the LORD has not spoken?'—  
<sup>22</sup> when a prophet speaks in the name of the LORD, if the word does not come to pass or come true, that is a word that the LORD has not spoken; the prophet has spoken it presumptuously. You need not be afraid of him.

- *A prophet's words must be consistent with scripture and be accurate in its fulfillment.*

The following verse occurs in the middle of a discussion about orderly worship in a church.

### **1 Corinthians 14:29-33 (ESV)**

<sup>29</sup> Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said. <sup>30</sup> If a revelation is made to another sitting there, let the first be silent. <sup>31</sup> For you can all prophesy one by one, so that all may learn and all be encouraged, <sup>32</sup> and the spirits of prophets are subject to prophets. <sup>33</sup> For God is not a God of confusion but of peace.

## Why might God want to send a specific message to a church?

Do you think God still wants to communicate to churches today? What are your thoughts?

## How might true, godly prophecy strengthen the church?

### **1 Corinthians 12:28 (ESV)**

*And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers...*

### **Ephesians 2:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone...

### **Revelation 18:20 (ESV)**

*Rejoice over her, O heaven, and you saints and apostles and prophets, for God has given judgment for you against her!*

**Why do you think God highlights the roles of apostle and prophet with regard to the leadership of the church?**

*Both these roles exercise a great degree of responsibility for representing God to the broader kingdom. The roles of apostle and prophet are not consigned to just one local church but have implications for the broader church of Jesus Christ. They prevent churches from becoming independent factions of the larger body. They call all churches to remember there is one leader over all the churches, Jesus Christ.*

## EVANGELIST

**Acts 21:8 (ESV)**

*On the next day we departed and came to Caesarea, and we entered the house of Philip the evangelist, who was one of the seven, and stayed with him.*

**Why do you think the role of evangelist is listed as one of the leadership ministries of the local church?**

*The church exists to fulfill a mission; evangelism is all about mission. The role of the evangelist is to equip God's people to carry out their mission as a church. Gifted evangelists may be more effective than the rest of us, but we still need to embrace this mission. The evangelist keeps the importance of mission forefront in the church's mind and strategy.*

**2 Timothy 4:5 (ESV)**

*As for you, always be sober-minded, endure suffering, do the work of an evangelist, fulfill your ministry.*

**What will happen to a church that ignores the leadership function of the evangelist?**

## SHEPHERD

**1 Peter 5:2 (ESV)**

*...shepherd the flock of God that is among you, exercising oversight, not under compulsion, but willingly, as God would have you; not for shameful gain, but eagerly...*

**Since we covered this topic in the previous study, we will not spend time on it now.**

## TEACHER

**James 3:1 (ESV)**

*Not many of you should become teachers, my brothers, for you know that we who teach will be judged with greater strictness.*

**Why do you think teachers will be held so accountable?**

**What does this five-fold leadership team concept reveal about a single person's ability to lead the entire church?**

**In what ways could you encourage and support people God has called to these ministry roles?**

**If we understand these roles are critical to the strengthening of everyone in the church, how might that affect how we pray for them?**

# CHURCH LEADERSHIP

## SESSION 3: STRUGGLING WITH AUTHORITY

At some point in time, everyone has struggled with someone in authority, whether a parent, a policeman, a politician, or a church leader.

Why do you think there is so much tension with authority in our world?

The Apostles understood tension with both religious and political authorities, yet look at the words they wrote.

### **Romans 13:1-7 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God. <sup>2</sup> Therefore whoever resists the authorities resists what God has appointed, and those who resist will incur judgment. <sup>3</sup> For rulers are not a terror to good conduct, but to bad. Would you have no fear of the one who is in authority? Then do what is good, and you will receive his approval, <sup>4</sup> for he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. <sup>5</sup> Therefore one must be in subjection, not only to avoid God's wrath but also for the sake of conscience. <sup>6</sup> For because of this you also pay taxes, for the authorities are ministers of God, attending to this very thing. <sup>7</sup> Pay to all what is owed to them: taxes to whom taxes are owed, revenue to whom revenue is owed, respect to whom respect is owed, honor to whom honor is owed.

### **1 Peter 2:13-14 (ESV)**

<sup>13</sup> Be subject for the Lord's sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, <sup>14</sup> or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do evil and to praise those who do good.

**What is the base argument as to why we should submit to and honor those in positions of authority over us?**

*Leadership is a God-designed concept. Though the leader may not be godly, the office of leadership they fill demands respect and honor as they represent God's rule on the earth. God will hold them accountable for how they rule or fail to rule on his behalf, but we are still to respect the office, regardless of how the leader acts.*

**What type of leadership was in place when Paul and Peter wrote these words?**

*The political and spiritual leadership that were in place (Roman government and Jewish authorities) were hostile to Christianity and growing increasingly so. All the Apostles were ultimately executed for their faith by these or other authorities. Yet, in light of this, they still taught submission to these very authorities.*

**Acts 23:3-5 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> Then Paul said to him, “God is going to strike you, you whitewashed wall! Are you sitting to judge me according to the law, and yet contrary to the law you order me to be struck?” <sup>4</sup> Those who stood by said, “Would you revile God’s high priest?” <sup>5</sup> And Paul said, “I did not know, brothers, that he was the high priest, for it is written, ‘You shall not speak evil of a ruler of your people.’”

**Exodus 22:28 (ESV)**

“You shall not revile God, nor curse a ruler of your people.

**If we are to respect leadership, how might that affect how we talk about them and to them?**

**We often find it easy to get caught up in criticizing the faults of leadership. Instead of constantly condemning leaders, what should be our attitude towards them? Why?**

*Leadership is extremely difficult. A leader needs encouragement and affirmation, not condemnation. Condemnation very rarely turns a bad leader into a better leader. Condemnation merely makes a bad tension even worse. Encouragement is a much better motivation to help a leader be what God has called him/her to be. A leader will always have weaknesses. We need to build around a leader’s weakness and free them to be effective in the areas of their strengths.*

**Is it possible you may need to repent to God for your attitude toward certain leaders – political, vocational or spiritual? What type of leadership do you find you are most critical toward?**

**Does this mean we are never to deal with conflict with a leader? If so, how should this be handled?**

**1 Thessalonians 5:12-13 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, <sup>13</sup> and to esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Be at peace among yourselves.

**Why does Paul tell us to respect those leaders who work hard among us in the church?**

**Why do you think Paul felt he needed to give this directive?**

**In what ways do we sometimes disrupt the peace and unity of the church in “how” we relate to church leaders?**

**1 Timothy 5:17-18 (ESV)**

*<sup>17</sup> Let the elders who rule well be considered worthy of double honor, especially those who labor in preaching and teaching. <sup>18</sup> For the Scripture says, “You shall not muzzle an ox when it treads out the grain,” and, “The laborer deserves his wages.”*

**What is Paul implying about the importance of the role that elders play in the church?**

**Hebrews 13:17 (ESV)**

*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls, as those who will have to give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with groaning, for that would be of no advantage to you.*

**In what ways are we to submit to church leaders?**

*We are to submit to and obey church leaders when they call us to live according to scripture and to act in ways that do not harm the family of God. In other words, we are to submit to them in the areas of life where God has called them to provide oversight and protection for the church. They will be held very accountable to God with regard to how they use or abuse this authority.*

**Do you feel the way you relate to church leaders is making their work a joy or a burden?**

Elders play a significant God-designed role in the church, and therefore that role is to be respected. But we also know that church leaders are human and can sometimes act in sinful ways. Some people have been deeply wounded by those in spiritual authority.

**How should we respond if we believe elders are ungodly in their leadership?**

**We always have a responsibility to speak to any Christ-follower if we believe they are engaging in sin.**

**Galatians 6:1 (ESV)**

*Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.*

**What should we do if the leader does not repent of sinful activity?**

**Matthew 18:15-17 (ESV)**

*<sup>15</sup> If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. <sup>16</sup> But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every charge may be established by the evidence of two or three witnesses. <sup>17</sup> If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church. And if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.*

**1 Timothy 5:19 (ESV)**

*Do not admit a charge against an elder except on the evidence of two or three witnesses.*

*When Paul discusses accusing an elder in 1 Timothy 5:19, he is referring to sinful activity that would disqualify an elder from serving in that capacity.*

**Why do you think Paul placed this restriction of multiple witnesses on listening to accusations?**

**How might you encourage your church leadership this week?**

**NOTE FOR ALL:**

Sometimes people have been wounded by a leader, and they carry judgment against that leader, or perhaps all leadership, for many years. In so doing, they become trapped in bitterness and distrust, unable to lovingly embrace and apply the scriptures addressed in this study.

The key here is to go back and reflect on the studies in the “Living Your Faith” series dealing with judgment and forgiveness. Judgment creates a barrier between you and God and traps you in the past. By trusting God to be judge, it will free you to love your enemies and those who have hurt you. It will also free you to be able to trust other leaders, knowing God is ultimately in control and will take care of you.

Everyone is sinful. Our foundation in life is never to come from leaders or anyone else; it is always to be rooted in Christ. No downfall of any leader should shake the core of our faith or how we relate to others. If the sinful actions of a leader have caused you to put up personal walls of defense and judgment, then it reveals that your faith was more rooted in man than in God and his purposes. That type of faith will always fail and render you ineffective in the kingdom of God. You can stop judging, you can forgive, and you can be free to trust God works through leaders.

# CHURCH LEADERSHIP

## SESSION 1: HOPE

### THE THEOLOGY OF HOPE

The study of the end times is really a study of hope. Everything written in scripture regarding the future gives us a hope that, when embraced, will keep us focused on Christ and his mission in the present.

**Some have said that the theology of hope is the base theology upon which every other theology is built. What are your thoughts regarding this statement?**

Friedrich Nietzsche said,  
“Hope is the worst of evils, for it prolongs the torment of man.”

**What do you think of his perspective on hope? Does hope potentially cheat man of happiness in the present?**

**Is there some sense in which hope makes us discontent in the present, but in a righteous way?**

Augustine wrote,  
“Hope has two beautiful daughters.  
Their names are Anger and Courage; anger at the way things are,  
and courage to see that they do not remain the way they are.”

**What do you think of Augustine’s perspective?**

**Paul wrote:**

***Colossians 1:5 (NIV)***

*...the faith and love that spring from the hope that is stored up for you in heaven and that you have already heard about in the word of truth, the gospel...*

**In what ways do you think our faith and love spring from hope?**

END TIMES

**How might a lack of hope affect how we live and relate to others?**

**Hebrews 11:1 (ESV)**

*Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.*

**How would you explain, in your own words, the definition of faith as it relates to hope?**

**If faith is rooted in a certainty of what we are waiting for, what exactly is it that we are waiting for?**

**Romans 8:22-25 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> *For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now.*

<sup>23</sup> *And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.* <sup>24</sup> *For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees?* <sup>25</sup> *But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.*

**Why do believers “groan” in the present time?**

*Believers have already been given a new spirit, but our bodies are still corrupted by sin. We long for the day when we will be given a new body, and perfected in the image of Christ. Until then, we still struggle with the appeal and affects of sin in our bodies.*

*We also long for the day when we will see God face to face and our adoption is complete. Until then, we still experience physical separation from God.*

**If our hope is so far off, why should we persevere?**

*We persevere because it is the hope of a better, eternal future. We persevere because the hope of the future gives us strength and wisdom to get through the present. The alternative is to abandon all hope and be stuck with the present reality until future judgment.*

**1 Peter 1:3-4 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,* <sup>4</sup> *to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you...*

END TIMES

**Why does Peter call our hope a “living hope”?**

*Our hope is not simply an expectation resting in the future. It is something that has life changing power in the present. Hope breathes life into our faith and love. Hope gives us the courage to persevere. Hope gives our lives focus and mission during our time on earth. In essence, hope is all about life now, and in the future.*

**In what ways might the anticipation of a vacation shape how you live months in advance? Share from your own experience.**

*When one plans for a vacation it impacts many areas of life. Depending on where you are going you may need to get vaccinations 6 months in advance. It could mean setting aside money monthly to cover the expenses of the trip. It will likely involve internet research to find out places to stay, sites to visit or people to see. It may mean exercising through the year to build up endurance if hiking is involved.*

**In what ways has the hope of Eternity impacted how you choose to live in the present?**

**If we took our hope seriously, what are some other ways we might start adjusting our present?**

**1 John 3:2-3 (ESV)**

*<sup>2</sup> Beloved, we are God’s children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is. <sup>3</sup> And everyone who thus hopes in him purifies himself as he is pure.*

**When you anticipate having company arrive at your house, what are the types of things you do to get ready?**

*When one is expecting company, they often clean up their house and themselves for their guests. We want to look (and smell) presentable. We also want our house to be orderly and enjoyable for our visitors. The anticipation of that meeting makes us want to be ready in every way possible so that it is an enjoyable experience for everyone.*

**What did John mean when he said that everyone who has this hope purifies himself?**

*If our ultimate goal is to be with and like Jesus, then that hope will work on us now so that we strive to live pure, sinless lives in the present. It would be a huge contradiction for someone to say I want to be with and like Jesus, and then live in a contrary manner. The hope of being with and like Jesus operates on our lives so that we submit to him, his character and his purposes.*

END TIMES

*This is NOT to say we need to purify ourselves in order to be accepted – we're already accepted. It is saying that when we live under this hope, we WANT to be like Jesus. We are already sanctified (purified) when we received his forgiveness and the Holy Spirit, but this passage is referring to how we live our lives on a daily basis.*

### **Colossians 1:25-27 (ESV)**

<sup>25</sup> ...of which I became a minister according to the stewardship from God that was given to me for you, to make the word of God fully known, <sup>26</sup> the mystery hidden for ages and generations but now revealed to his saints. <sup>27</sup> To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory.

### **What was the mystery that Paul was talking about?**

*The mystery was how the Gentiles could become co-heirs with the Jews. The Jews believed they were the people of God and that God's salvation and blessing was reserved for them alone. Through Christ's death, resurrection and sending of his Holy Spirit, God destroyed this understanding by indwelling Gentile believers as well. The hope of glory is available to all who put their faith in Jesus Christ. Jews and Gentiles become one family.*

### **Have you ever felt that some people were too far away spiritually to be saved by God?**

### **In what ways does the fact that God was able to bring Jew and Gentile together into one family give us hope for spiritually distant people?**

*If God can tear down that diving wall of hostility (Ephesians 2:14), he can tear down any barrier that exists between us and him, or between us and others. There is no one that is too far from the Kingdom of God that they cannot be saved, if they turn to Jesus. There is no one you have yet encountered that is beyond the power of hope. There is no one so far removed that they cannot be brought into your spiritual family. Saul/Paul is the greatest example of the grace of God that gives hope to the hopeless. Christianity's greatest persecutor became its greatest promoter.*

### **Hebrews 6:17-20 (ESV)**

<sup>17</sup> So when God desired to show more convincingly to the heirs of the promise the unchangeable character of his purpose, he guaranteed it with an oath, <sup>18</sup> so that by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to hold fast to the hope set before us. <sup>19</sup> We have this as a sure and steadfast anchor of the soul, a hope that enters into the inner place behind the curtain, <sup>20</sup> where Jesus has gone as a forerunner on our behalf, having become a high priest forever after the order of Melchizedek.

**In what ways is our understanding of the word “hope” different from how the world uses it?**

*The world uses the word “hope” as a wishful thinking that may or may not come true. It is equivalent to saying, “I hope it doesn’t rain next week.” But there is no guarantee. Biblical hope is rooted in God’s oath and promise, and it is impossible for God to lie. Therefore, our hope is based on a confident expectation of what is to come, as opposed to a wishful desire.*

**In what ways is hope an anchor for our soul?**

*If we are unsure about our future, we waver with regard to how we should live and make decisions. We question everything and tend to sway back and forth in life direction and commitment. Where our hope is based in a concrete reality that cannot fail, it gives us stability and direction in the present. We know where we are going, we know how to get there, and we know how to live accordingly.*

**What would your life be like if you did not have certainty about your faith?**

**Psalm 43:5 (ESV)**

*Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.*

**In what ways does hope change our perspective on life?**

**Romans 15:13 (ESV)**

*May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that by the power of the Holy Spirit you may abound in hope.*

**In what ways does hope give us joy?**

**In what ways does hope give us peace?**

**What is the implication if we are not experiencing joy or peace in our lives?**

*If we are not experiencing joy or peace it is because we have lost sight of what is waiting for us. We have become focused on our present circumstances forgetting that God has already created a way to deal with each problem.*

END TIMES

**2 Corinthians 3:12 (ESV)**

*Since we have such a hope, we are very bold...*

**In what way does keeping focused on our hope give us boldness?**

**What are some of the barriers to staying focused on our hope?**

**If you truly believe the hope to which he has called you, how might you live differently this week?**

**What are some practical ways we can stay focused on the hope we have in Christ in this coming week?**

END TIMES

## SESSION 2: END TIME EVENTS

### END TIMES

The goal of this study is not to promote a specific timeline perspective but to highlight the significant events of the end times and provide understanding as to some of the various viewpoints.

**As you think about the end times, what are some of the major events, and how might you place them into a timeline?**

*Teacher's Note:* Teachers, you may want to sketch the various events in a timeline as people raise them. They may differ on when and where to place things. Watch to see how they interact with each other if they hold different perspectives. Don't let the discussion get too heated if people start arguing different perspectives.

**Sometimes discussion of the end times can produce very strong opinions and reactions to differing views. Why might this topic evoke such reactions among people?**

**Why do you think there are so many differing views when it comes to the study of end times?**

#### **Titus 3:9-11 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> But avoid foolish controversies, genealogies, dissensions, and quarrels about the law, for they are unprofitable and worthless. <sup>10</sup> As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, <sup>11</sup> knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

**At what point does a healthy theological discussion turn into a divisive controversy?**

*There will always be differences of opinion on some topics (especially this one), but if love and respect stop being conveyed in the communication, then we have lost perspective. At those times, it is no longer about learning from one another or seeking truth but about winning.*

*When arguments break out, it ceases to be a "topic for discussion simply"; instead, it turns into something we are emotionally tied to. It is easy to feel we must defend our perspective to feel good about ourselves. We also need the other person to agree with us to feel good about them. The discussion becomes more "me" driven than "truth" driven.*

END TIMES

**Have you ever found yourself getting angry over a disagreement on an issue?**

Why did it evoke anger or frustration?

Why were you not able to let the other person believe what they chose to believe?

Why were you emotionally tied to the topic?

Below are some of the major happenings in the last days.

**THE RISE OF AN ANTI-CHRIST GOVERNMENT****Revelation 13:1-18 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> And I saw a beast rising out of the sea, with ten horns and seven heads, with ten diadems on its horns and blasphemous names on its heads. <sup>2</sup> And the beast that I saw was like a leopard; its feet were like a bear's, and its mouth was like a lion's mouth. And to it the dragon gave his power and his throne and great authority. <sup>3</sup> One of its heads seemed to have a mortal wound, but its mortal wound was healed, and the whole earth marveled as they followed the beast. <sup>4</sup> And they worshiped the dragon, for he had given his authority to the beast, and they worshiped the beast, saying, "Who is like the beast, and who can fight against it?"

<sup>5</sup> And the beast was given a mouth uttering haughty and blasphemous words, and it was allowed to exercise authority for forty-two months. <sup>6</sup> It opened its mouth to utter blasphemies against God, blaspheming his name and his dwelling, that is, those who dwell in heaven. <sup>7</sup> Also it was allowed to make war on the saints and to conquer them. And authority was given it over every tribe and people and language and nation, <sup>8</sup> and all who dwell on earth will worship it, everyone whose name has not been written before the foundation of the world in the book of life of the Lamb who was slain. <sup>9</sup> If anyone has an ear, let him hear: <sup>10</sup> If anyone is to be taken captive, to captivity he goes; if anyone is to be slain with the sword, with the sword must he be slain. Here is a call for the endurance and faith of the saints. <sup>11</sup> Then I saw another beast rising out of the earth. It had two horns like a lamb and it spoke like a dragon. <sup>12</sup> It exercises all the authority of the first beast in its presence, and makes the earth and its inhabitants worship the first beast, whose mortal wound was healed. <sup>13</sup> It performs great signs, even making fire come down from heaven to earth in front of people, <sup>14</sup> and by the signs that it is allowed to work in the presence of the beast it deceives those who dwell on earth, telling them to make an image for the beast that was wounded by the sword and yet lived. <sup>15</sup> And it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast, so that the image of the beast might even speak and might cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be slain. <sup>16</sup> Also it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slave, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead, <sup>17</sup> so that no one can buy or sell unless he has the mark, that is, the name of the beast or the number of its name. <sup>18</sup> This calls for wisdom: let the one who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man, and his number is 666.

**Revelation 17:12-14 (ESV)**

<sup>12</sup> And the ten horns that you saw are ten kings who have not yet received royal power, but they are to receive authority as kings for one hour, together with the beast. <sup>13</sup> These are of one mind, and they hand over their power and authority to the beast. <sup>14</sup> They will make war on the Lamb, and the Lamb will conquer them, for he is Lord of lords and King of kings, and those with him are called and chosen and faithful."

### **Why did Jesus reveal the future rise of this government?**

*John was directed to write this revelation at a time when Christians were being persecuted by an evil, anti-Christian government. The believers needed encouragement to know that God was still in control of history and was working out his plan despite what the circumstances seemed to indicate.*

*It would also prepare believers to persevere when this future government comes to power. At a time when it would be easy for people to lose faith, God tells them to stand firm, knowing that these events have to take place to fulfill his ultimate plan.*

### **Why do you think Jesus will allow his church to suffer in such a significant way?**

*Suffering is simply the result of living in a sin-tainted world.*

#### ***John 16:33 (ESV)***

*I have said these things to you, that in me you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation. But take heart; I have overcome the world.*

#### ***1 Peter 4:12-13 (ESV)***

*<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not be surprised at the fiery trial when it comes upon you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. <sup>13</sup> But rejoice insofar as you share Christ's sufferings, that you may also rejoice and be glad when his glory is revealed.*

Though times of suffering will inevitably come, Jesus promises to see us through the suffering and then use it to purify and strengthen our walk with him. Many passages talk about how God uses suffering for our benefit and his glory.

(Acts 5:41, Rom 8:17-18, 2 Cor 1, Eph 3:13, Php 1:29, 2 Thes 1:5, Heb 5:8, 1 Pt 1, 1 Pt 4:13, Rev 9:5)

## **TRIBULATION**

#### ***Matthew 24:21-22 (NIV)***

*<sup>21</sup> For then there will be great distress, unequaled from the beginning of the world until now--and never to be equaled again. <sup>22</sup> If those days had not been cut short, no one would survive, but for the sake of the elect those days will be shortened.*

#### ***Daniel 12:1 (NIV)***

*At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people--everyone whose name is found written in the book--will be delivered.*

**Revelation 6:12-17 (NIV)**

<sup>12</sup> I watched as he opened the sixth seal. There was a great earthquake. The sun turned black like sackcloth made of goat hair, the whole moon turned blood red, <sup>13</sup> and the stars in the sky fell to earth, as late figs drop from a fig tree when shaken by a strong wind. <sup>14</sup> The sky receded like a scroll, rolling up, and every mountain and island was removed from its place. <sup>15</sup> Then the kings of the earth, the princes, the generals, the rich, the mighty, and every slave and every free man hid in caves and among the rocks of the mountains. <sup>16</sup> They called to the mountains and the rocks, "Fall on us and hide us from the face of him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb!" <sup>17</sup> For the great day of their wrath has come, and who can stand?"

**What do you think is the purpose for this great time of distress?**

**Why do you think we are told of it in advance?**

**2 Witnesses****Revelation 11:3-12 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> And I will grant authority to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth." <sup>4</sup> These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. <sup>5</sup> And if anyone would harm them, fire pours from their mouth and consumes their foes. If anyone would harm them, this is how he is doomed to be killed. <sup>6</sup> They have the power to shut the sky, that no rain may fall during the days of their prophesying, and they have power over the waters to turn them into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague, as often as they desire. <sup>7</sup> And when they have finished their testimony, the beast that rises from the bottomless pit will make war on them and conquer them and kill them, <sup>8</sup> and their dead bodies will lie in the street of the great city that symbolically is called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was crucified. <sup>9</sup> For three and a half days some from the peoples and tribes and languages and nations will gaze at their dead bodies and refuse to let them be placed in a tomb, <sup>10</sup> and those who dwell on the earth will rejoice over them and make merry and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to those who dwell on the earth. <sup>11</sup> But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood up on their feet, and great fear fell on those who saw them. <sup>12</sup> Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here!" And they went up to heaven in a cloud, and their enemies watched them.

**What is the purpose of a lampstand, and how does it explain the role of the two witnesses?**

**In what way was this God's last opportunity to show grace to the world?**

END TIMES

## THE RETURN OF CHRIST/ GATHERING OF BELIEVERS

### **Matthew 24:27, 30-31 (ESV)**

<sup>27</sup> For as the lightning comes from the east and shines as far as the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man.

<sup>30</sup> Then will appear in heaven the sign of the Son of Man, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. <sup>31</sup> And he will send out his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

### **1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (ESV)**

<sup>51</sup> Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, <sup>52</sup> in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.

### **1 Thessalonians 4:15-17 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. <sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord.

**In what ways might these passages encourage us?**

**What excites you the most about this event?**

**What do you think our new bodies will be like?**

END TIMES

## 1000 YEAR REIGN OF CHRIST (SATAN BOUND)

### **Revelation 20:1-4 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, holding in his hand the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain. <sup>2</sup> And he seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years, <sup>3</sup> and threw him into the pit, and shut it and sealed it over him, so that he might not deceive the nations any longer, until the thousand years were ended. After that he must be released for a little while.

<sup>4</sup> Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.

### **Isaiah 11:1-11 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch from his roots shall bear fruit. <sup>2</sup> And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. <sup>3</sup> And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. He shall not judge by what his eyes see, or decide disputes by what his ears hear, <sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he shall judge the poor, and decide with equity for the meek of the earth; and he shall strike the earth with the rod of his mouth, and with the breath of his lips he shall kill the wicked. <sup>5</sup> Righteousness shall be the belt of his waist, and faithfulness the belt of his loins.

<sup>6</sup> The wolf shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat, and the calf and the lion and the fattened calf together; and a little child shall lead them. <sup>7</sup> The cow and the bear shall graze; their young shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. <sup>8</sup> The nursing child shall play over the hole of the cobra, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the adder's den. <sup>9</sup> They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain; for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea.

<sup>10</sup> In that day the root of Jesse, who shall stand as a signal for the peoples—of him shall the nations inquire, and his resting place shall be glorious.

<sup>11</sup> In that day the Lord will extend his hand yet a second time to recover the remnant that remains of his people, from Assyria, from Egypt, from Pathros, from Cush, from Elam, from Shinar, from Hamath, and from the coastlands of the sea.

### **If the thousand-year reign of Christ is a literal reign, what do you think the purpose is?**

*It is possible that this removes man's last attempt at a feeble excuse as to their unbelief. Man will not be able to say that their unbelief was due to a lack of knowledge or understanding. They will have lived under Christ's rule for over one thousand years, experiencing the benefits of his reign. Yet, even at the end of this time, they will still rise in revolt.*

### **In what way does the Isaiah passage reveal "image rule" restored to the entire earth?**

*All believers will be fully restored to their ruling capacity as in the garden of Eden. We will be able to subdue the earth and bring it into order and peace as Christ reigns through us.*

END TIMES

## SATAN'S JUDGMENT

### **Revelation 20:7-10 (ESV)**

*<sup>7</sup> And when the thousand years are ended, Satan will be released from his prison <sup>8</sup> and will come out to deceive the nations that are at the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them for battle; their number is like the sand of the sea. <sup>9</sup> And they marched up over the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, but fire came down from heaven and consumed them, <sup>10</sup> and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.*

**Why do you think God releases Satan at the end of the thousand years?**

**What does this ultimate rebellion against Jesus reveal about the sin-nature of man?**

## JUDGMENT: THE GREAT WHITE THRONE

### **Daniel 7:9-10 (ESV)**

*<sup>9</sup> As I looked, thrones were placed, and the Ancient of Days took his seat; his clothing was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was fiery flames; its wheels were burning fire. <sup>10</sup> A stream of fire issued and came out from before him; a thousand thousands served him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him; the court sat in judgment, and the books were opened.*

### **Matthew 25:31-32, 46 (ESV)**

*<sup>31</sup> When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on his glorious throne. <sup>32</sup> Before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats.*

*<sup>46</sup> And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*

### **Revelation 20:11-15 (ESV)**

*<sup>11</sup> Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. <sup>13</sup> And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. <sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

**Jude 1:14-15 (ESV)**

<sup>14</sup> It was also about these that Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied, saying, “Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his holy ones, <sup>15</sup> to execute judgment on all and to convict all the ungodly of all their deeds of ungodliness that they have committed in such an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things that ungodly sinners have spoken against him.”

**Do these passages raise any questions for you?**

END TIMES

**NEW EARTH**

**Revelation 21:1-4 (NIV)**

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. <sup>2</sup> I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”

**What do you look forward to the most about the New Earth?**

**There are a variety of views as to how these events should be placed on a timeline. Below are three popular views.**

**AMILLENNIALISM** (no-millennium):

The thousand-year reign of Christ is figurative of Christ’s reign through the church since the time of his resurrection, not a literal earthly rule. Satan is considered to be defeated and bound during this time, to be released at the very last days to deceive the nations. At the end of this time, Christ will come to judge the unrighteous and usher the church into eternity.



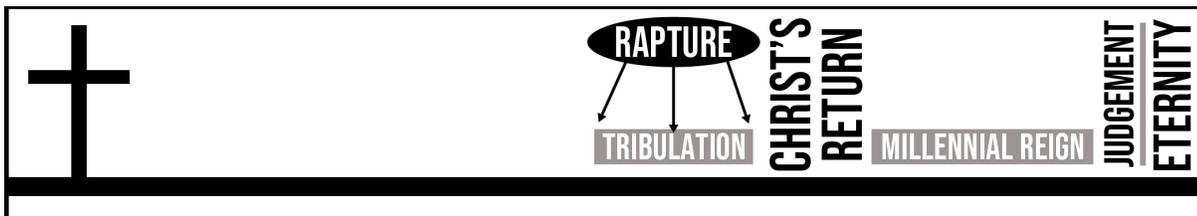
## POST-MILLENNIALISM

Christ will reign in a spiritual sense through the church (not a literal thousand years) in some future time when Satan is bound, or his power is decreased. During this time, the gospel will advance around the earth, and many will place faith in Christ. At the end of this era, Satan will be released, and the nations will be deceived. Christ will come to raise both the righteous and the wicked at the same time, judge the wicked, and take the church into glory.



## PRE-MILLENNIALISM

Pre-Millennialism teaches that there will be seven years of tribulation around which time believers will be caught in the air to meet Jesus. Depending on various viewpoints, this rapture will occur either before the tribulation (pre-trib), in the middle of the tribulation (mid-trib), or at the end of the tribulation when Christ returns (post-trib). After the seven years of tribulation, Christ will return to overthrow the Anti-Christ government and establish an earthly kingdom for 1000 years, along with the resurrected and transformed believers. Satan is bound during this time, and Earth will experience peace. At the end of this age, Satan will be released to deceive the nations once again, and then judgment will come.



### What is the ultimate reason we are given these insights into the future?

*The ultimate goal of these insights is to affirm that despite how things may seem in the present, God is in control and has everything worked out. This encouragement is to give us hope so that we will persevere and stay true to Jesus Christ when difficult times come.*

### 1 Thessalonians 5:1-4 (ESV)

<sup>1</sup> Now concerning the times and the seasons, brothers, you have no need to have anything written to you.

<sup>2</sup> For you yourselves are fully aware that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. <sup>3</sup> While people are saying, "There is peace and security," then sudden destruction will come upon them as labor pains come upon a pregnant woman, and they will not escape. <sup>4</sup> But you are not in darkness, brothers, for that day to surprise you like a thief.

**2 Peter 3:8-10 (ESV)**

<sup>8</sup> But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.

**Why do you think God doesn't tell us when Christ will return?**

**Why does he want us to live with a constant sense of his possible imminent return?**

**Why does Christ delay in returning?**

**1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV)**

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.

**Explain the two ways hope impact our lives:**

- 1) Keeps you from moving:
- 2) Causes you to move – get working:

**If you knew Christ's return was soon, how would it change your life?**

END TIMES

## SESSION 3: UNDERSTANDING JUDGMENT

### THE FINAL JUDGMENT

As you think about the idea of what we typically refer to as “Hell,” how would you describe it?

Are there some concepts of Hell that disturb you?

Why do you think God might have created such a place?

The word “Hell” does not actually occur in the Bible in the Greek or Hebrew language. It is an old English word referring to the realm of the dead. Unfortunately, the word “Hell” is often used in translations when describing three very distinct locations mentioned in the Bible. This makes it confusing and can lead to misinterpretations. Below are its three uses and the biblical words used to describe the various locations.

#### 1) The Place of the Dead

**Sheol** (Old Testament Hebrew)

***Psalm 6:5 (ESV)***

*For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise?*

**Hades** (New Testament Greek)

***Matthew 16:18 (ESV)***

*And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of hell [Hades] shall not prevail against it.*

Sheol and Hades were general references to the place of the dead. Scripture did not differentiate between the righteous and unrighteous in this regard. Until the time of Christ’s resurrection, people who died went to a waiting place for the dead.

END TIMES

**2) Place of Temporary Judgment** for some of the Fallen Angels:**Tartarus** (Pits of Gloom)**2 Peter 2:4 (ESV)**

*For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell [Tartarus] and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment...*

**The Abyss****Luke 8:30-31 (ESV)**

*<sup>30</sup> Jesus then asked him, "What is your name?" And he said, "Legion," for many demons had entered him. <sup>31</sup> And they begged him not to command them to depart into the abyss.*

Tartarus, or the Abyss, seems to be a place specifically reserved for a portion of Satan's angelic followers who await Judgment.

**3) Place of Future Judgment****Gehenna****Jeremiah 7:31 (ESV)**

*And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into my mind.*

**Matthew 23:33 (ESV)**

*You serpents, you brood of vipers, how are you to escape being sentenced to hell [Gehenna]?*

This term originally referred to a valley where child sacrifices were offered outside of Jerusalem. Over time it simply became a garbage dump that was constantly on fire. It became symbolic of God's future fiery judgment and punishment of sin.

**Lake of Fire:****Revelation 20:14-15 (ESV)**

*<sup>14</sup> Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*

This is what we typically think of as Hell

Below are some additional descriptions of the judgment to come. Read each set of passages and write some summary words in the right column.

Passage	Summary
<p><b>Daniel 12:2 (ESV)</b>  <i>And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.</i></p>	<p><i>Eternal contempt</i>  <i>Eternal punishment</i>  <i>Eternal torment</i></p>
<p><b>Matthew 25:46 (ESV)</b>  <i>And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.</i></p>	
<p><b>Revelation 20:10 (ESV)</b>  <i>...and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.</i></p>	

**TEACHER’S NOTE:**

*Some teach that the Greek word translated “forever and ever” implies that it is only for one “age” of many ages. In other words, judgment is not eternal - just for a time. The struggle with this view is that the same term is also used in reference to God’s unending right to receive worship and the salvation of believers.*

*See the verses below:*

**1 Timothy 1:17 (ESV)**

*To the King of the ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.*

**Revelation 5:13 (ESV)**

*And I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and in the sea, and all that is in them, saying, “To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be blessing and honor and glory and might forever and ever!”*

**Matthew 25:46 (ESV)**

*And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*

END TIMES

Passage	Summary
<p><b>Matthew 25:41 (ESV)</b>  <i>Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.</i></p> <p><b>Revelation 20:14-15 (ESV)</b>  <sup>14</sup> <i>Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. <sup>15</sup> And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.</i></p>	<p><i>Eternal Fire</i></p>
<p><b>2 Thessalonians 1:9 (ESV)</b>  <i>They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might...</i></p>	<p><i>Everlasting destruction                      Separation from God</i></p>
<p><b>Matthew 13:49-50 (ESV)</b>  <sup>49</sup> <i>So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.</i></p>	<p><i>Fiery furnace</i></p>
<p><b>Revelation 14:10 (ESV)</b>  <i>...he also will drink the wine of God's wrath, poured full strength into the cup of his anger, and he will be tormented with fire and sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb.</i></p>	<p><i>Tormented with fire</i></p>
<p><b>Matthew 8:12 (ESV)</b>  <i>...while the sons of the kingdom will be thrown into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.</i></p> <p><b>2 Peter 2:17 (ESV)</b>  <i>These are waterless springs and mists driven by a storm. For them the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved.</i></p>	<p><i>Darkness                      Torment                      Weeping and gnashing of teeth</i></p>

What are some of Jesus' parables or analogies you can think of that strike home the reality of the coming judgment?

*Examples:*

***Good tree/Bad tree:***

***Matthew 7:18-19 (ESV)***

*<sup>18</sup> A healthy tree cannot bear bad fruit, nor can a diseased tree bear good fruit. <sup>19</sup> Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.*

***Wheat and the Tares***

***Matthew 13:30 (ESV)***

*Let both grow together until the harvest, and at harvest time I will tell the reapers, Gather the weeds first and bind them in bundles to be burned, but gather the wheat into my barn.*

***Good fish, Bad fish***

***Matthew 13:48-50 (ESV)***

*<sup>48</sup> When it was full, men drew it ashore and sat down and sorted the good into containers but threw away the bad. <sup>49</sup> So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come out and separate the evil from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

***Improperly dressed guest at the wedding banquet***

***Matthew 22:13 (ESV)***

*Then the king said to the attendants, "Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

***Parable of the talents***

***Matthew 25:30 (ESV)***

*And cast the worthless servant into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.*

***Sheep and Goats***

***Matthew 25:46 (ESV)***

*And these will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.*

Why do you think so many of Jesus' parables talked about the Judgment at the end of time?

END TIMES

How should a deeper understanding of judgment impact us?

How do you respond to the statement that a loving God would never send someone to judgment?

What do the following verses reveal about the love of God?

**1 Timothy 2:3-4 (ESV)**

<sup>3</sup> This is good, and it is pleasing in the sight of God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.

**2 Peter 3:9 (ESV)**

The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance.

**John 3:16-18 (ESV)**

<sup>16</sup> "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. <sup>17</sup> For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him. <sup>18</sup> Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God.

**God desires that no one should experience Judgment.**

- *He paid the price for our sin*
- *He conquered death*
- *He offers us forgiveness and a place in his family*
- *He gives us life eternal with him*
- *He expresses the full extent of his love toward us*

*The only thing God does not do is force us to embrace him and receive his forgiveness.*

*When all is said and done, he respects "the integrity of our choice" to face judgment on our own, but this deeply grieves him.*

**John 5:39-40 (ESV)**

<sup>39</sup> You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness about me, <sup>40</sup> yet you refuse to come to me that you may have life.

If this terrible fate awaits those who refuse to come to Jesus, why don't more people turn to him?

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**If this terrible fate awaits people, why are we not more motivated to reach out to people?**

**Why are we so uncomfortable talking about the coming judgment?**

**Why is preaching fear not a great means of turning people to God?**

*Just because someone fears judgment does not mean that they love God. True faith requires sincere repentance and a love for God. Without an authentic “relationship,” there is no salvation.*

**What role should an awareness of judgment play when reaching out to people?**

*Jesus clearly let people know what was at stake. Many of his parables indicated the type of future that was waiting for those who rejected God. But the primary focus of Jesus’ preaching was to proclaim the kingdom of God through his presence. He called people to himself and encouraged them to embrace a relationship with him as their Lord.*

*Our role is to point people to Jesus. Part of this will be to explain the big picture including judgment, but when all is said and done, we would prefer people to run in adoration “to” Jesus as opposed to running “from” the fires of judgment.*

**As you go through your week, try to look at people with the eternal perspective in mind. If you consider the reality of judgment, how might that spur you to action this week?**

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## SESSION 4: UNDERSTANDING HEAVEN

### HEAVEN

How would you describe Heaven to a friend?

What aspect of Heaven is most exciting to you?

#### **Revelation 21:1-5 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”

<sup>5</sup> And he who was seated on the throne said, “Behold, I am making all things new.” Also he said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

What seven things will not exist in our future, and why not?

#### 1) Old Earth and Heaven

*There is some discussion as to whether this is a literal destruction of the physical earth or a spiritual re-creation of the existing earth. It is most likely similar to our resurrected bodies which are “new,” glorified bodies but carry some semblance to our old ones.*

#### 2) Sea

*The sea was viewed as a place of ever-present danger. Though men sailed across it and fished from it, it always carried a constant threat of chaos and death. The sea also became a symbol of the mass of humanity and culture that was in opposition to God. It is interesting to note that the beastly government of Revelation arises from the sea (Rev 13:1). John says that this spiritual source of evil or danger will not exist on the new earth. There is no chaos, no threat, and no danger. No more will an unexpected evil arise from the people to threaten our security and life.*

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3) Tears

*There will be an initial wiping away of tears (most likely due to shame we will experience when we understand the full picture of our sinfulness), but then all tears will be gone. No longer will there be any cause to generate tears of sadness or shame.*

4) Death

*Death has been permanently defeated by the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Since sin has been done away with, so has the consequence of death been forever removed from our lives. We will no longer be motivated by fear or a sense of self-preservation.*

5) Mourning

*Since there is no more death, there is no more mourning. Mourning always has to do with loss, but there will be no loss, no regrets, and no sorrow on the new earth.*

6) Crying

*The word “crying” here has the idea of calling out in anger or discontentment. On the new earth, there will be nothing to cause outrage or dissatisfaction with the life we experience.*

7) Pain

*The word used here can refer to concern, deep unmet desires, or physical pain. John used this word previously in Revelation (Rev 16:10-11) to refer to physical pain, so that is most likely the intent here. On the new earth there will be no experience of pain or suffering. Everything will be life-breathing as opposed to life-taking.*

**Revelation 21:3 (ESV)**

*And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God.*

**In verse 3, the word “with” is repeated three times. Why does the passage repeatedly stress that God will be with us?**

*This is what it is all about: relationship. We were created to love God and be loved by God. Sin created a barrier/separation between God and us, and he has now permanently destroyed that barrier, bringing us to restored intimacy with him in every way.*

**In what ways does the new earth restore things to how they were in the Garden of Eden? In what ways will it be better?**

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**Revelation 21:9-10 (ESV)**

<sup>9</sup> Then came one of the seven angels who had the seven bowls full of the seven last plagues and spoke to me, saying, “Come, I will show you the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.”<sup>10</sup> And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great, high mountain, and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God...

**What does John mean when he describes the New Jerusalem as a bride?**

*The title “new Jerusalem” refers to the church, which has already been defined as the bride of Christ (Rev 19:7). Christ did not enter into a marriage relationship with a physical city, but with a people who are represented as a city. We are the Holy City. Whereas the city of Jerusalem in the past represented the place of God’s dwelling, the church now represents his dwelling place as he lives with and through us.*

*Therefore, the descriptions of the city that follow are designed to convey spiritual truths about the church. It may be that there is a physical city to reflect the spiritual reality, but the spiritual reality is the most significant issue for John as he writes.*

**Revelation 21:11-14 (ESV)**

<sup>11</sup> ...having the glory of God, its radiance like a most rare jewel, like a jasper, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup> It had a great, high wall, with twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and on the gates the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel were inscribed—<sup>13</sup> on the east three gates, on the north three gates, on the south three gates, and on the west three gates. <sup>14</sup> And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

**In what way does the church shine with the glory of God?**

**Romans 8:17-18 (ESV)**

*17 and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with him in order that we may also be glorified with him. 18 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.*

**2 Corinthians 3:18 (ESV)**

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.*

*If we have the Holy Spirit in us, then we will radiate the glory of God. If Moses’ face radiated God’s glory after meeting with him in a tent, how much more so those of us who have the Spirit within us (2 Cor 3:7-11)?*

**Teacher Note:** *The goal of this study is not to try to interpret every symbol as described in Revelation, as not all symbols are clearly explained or understood. Also, we don’t have the time to cover every symbol in detail in this one study. We will look more at the major brush strokes to get a big picture sense as to what is waiting for us in eternity.*

**What is the significance of the twelve gates and the foundations?**

*This description reveals that the church will be made up of both saints from the Old Testament and the New Testament. The people of God are people of faith from both Old Testament Israel and the church established by Jesus Christ - built upon the apostles.*

**Ephesians 2:19-20 (ESV)**

<sup>19</sup> So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup> built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone...

*In the Old Testament, the Israelites set up camp all around the Tabernacle, with only one entrance gate. This represented that we could not access the presence of God any way we desired but had to come through the one entrance he provided. Even then, before one could reach the presence of God, there were the barriers of the altar, the washbasin, the tent, the altar of incense, and finally, the curtain. In the New Jerusalem, we have unhindered access to the throne of God from any direction.*

**Revelation 21:15-17 (ESV)**

<sup>15</sup> And the one who spoke with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city and its gates and walls. <sup>16</sup> The city lies foursquare, its length the same as its width. And he measured the city with his rod, 12,000 stadia. Its length and width and height are equal. <sup>17</sup> He also measured its wall, 144 cubits by human measurement, which is also an angel's measurement.

**The size of the city is immense and forms a perfect cube. What is the significance of this?**

*The size perhaps indicates the magnitude of the church, as built over all the years of human history. The numbers may also be symbolic of the complete body of Christ, both Jew, and Gentile. Keep in mind, any interpretation that is not clearly explained in the Bible is merely an educated guess.*

*It is interesting to note that the Holy of Holies within the Tabernacle also formed a perfect cube. The Holy of Holies was representative of the throne room of God in the midst of the Israelites. If this is an accurate comparison, it enforces the idea that the church is now the dwelling place of God and that his throne is in our midst. This would be in contrast to our being separated from God's throne, as indicated by the inaccessibility of the Tabernacle's Holy of Holies. It would once again be a reminder that we all now, through Christ, have direct access to the throne of God.*

**Revelation 21:22-27 (ESV)**

<sup>22</sup> And I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb. <sup>23</sup> And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and its lamp is the Lamb. <sup>24</sup> By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it, <sup>25</sup> and its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. <sup>26</sup> They will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. <sup>27</sup> But nothing unclean will ever enter it, nor anyone who does what is detestable or false, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

What do you think life will be like on the new earth?

How might understanding this eternal picture impact how you live in the present?

How might it drive away fear and insecurity from our lives?

How might the hope of the future re-prioritize what you spend your time doing?

How might the hope of the future motivate you to share Jesus with others this coming week?

The Bible talks about being “rewarded” for what we’ve done on earth.

**Matthew 16:27 (ESV)**

*For the Son of Man is going to come with his angels in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each person according to what he has done.*

**Revelation 22:12 (NIV)**

*Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done.*

What are your thoughts on the idea of reward on the new earth?

What will be the basis for the reward we receive?

The whole purpose of the study of end times is to impact our lives in the present. As you look at your life, seriously consider how it frees you to live the Christ-life now.

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