

# **Steve McQueen: American Icon**

## **Small Group Study Guide**

**Based on the American Icon Film Release**

**In Partnership with Harvest Christian Fellowship**

*Steve McQueen: American Icon Small Group Study Guide*

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## How to Use This Study

The *Steve McQueen: American Icon Small Group Study Guide*, based on the American Icon Film *Steve McQueen: American Icon* is a digital resource designed to disciple and train new believers through small groups in the essential truths that are foundational to the Christian faith.

Regarding the discussion questions, feel free to personalize, edit, or skip any, according to the needs of your group. We recommend members use a journal or notebook to write down answers to questions, insights, and exercises in this study. We encourage everyone to keep a link to this study guide when completed for review or help in the days ahead.

## Introduction

Welcome to this four-session study produced by Harvest Christian Fellowship from the American Icon Film release *Steve McQueen: American Icon*. You are likely reading this because after watching the movie you made the same decision that legendary actor Steve McQueen and pastor Greg Laurie made in their lives to invite Jesus Christ to be Savior and Lord.

There are two types of decisions in this life: the ones we *must* make and those we *choose* to make. Everyone at some point in life will have the opportunity to choose to accept or reject Jesus Christ. The Bible makes this very clear in Romans 1:19-20. But you have chosen to choose Him! This will prove to be the most important as well as the best decision you will ever make because your relationship with Christ will impact every single area of your life—taking care of your past, changing your present, and securing your future.

But you did not come to this choice completely on your own. God’s Holy Spirit prepared you and led you to this brand new place. That is how much He loves you. God called you. You accepted. He has now received you as His own and you belong to Him.

*For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. So you have not received a spirit that makes you fearful slaves. Instead, you received God’s Spirit when he adopted you as his own children. Now we call him, “Abba, Father.” For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God’s children. (Romans 8:14-16 NLT)*

Jesus once asked His disciples an intriguing question that He has since asked every human being. Peter spoke up and gave his bold answer. Read this amazing conversation.

*When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, “Who do people say the Son of Man is?” They replied, “Some say John the Baptist; others say*

*Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.” “But what about you?” he asked. “Who do you say I am?” Simon Peter answered, “You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.” Jesus replied, “Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in heaven. (Matthew 16:13-17 NIV)*

This is the pivotal question all people must answer about Christ: “But what about you? Who do you say I am?” In Jesus’ time and throughout the centuries right up to today, people have been and are confused as to who He was and is. In this Bible passage, we see Peter responded with a deeply personal answer, saying in essence to Christ—I believe you are who you say you are and I know you are *my* Messiah. From that day forward, even though Peter struggled at times in his faith as we all do, his life was never the same again. Just like Steve McQueen’s. Just like Greg Laurie’s. Just like yours.

To firm up exactly what the Gospel states and also reflect on your own decision, watch this short clip of pastor Laurie presenting the truth of Christ from the film *Steve McQueen: American Icon*.

**[FILM CLIP: In at 1:16:25 at black slate with “Anaheim, California” to 1:21:00 Out at info slate over ocean shot before music begins.]**

Regarding your own journey, we want to encourage you to prayerfully read and identify with one of these three statements that best fit where you are spiritually right now.

1—“I have not made a decision for Christ or prayed the prayer Pastor Laurie led people through in the film and I am not yet ready to make such a commitment. I still have questions and concerns so that is why I want to go through this study.”

If this is your answer, we are so glad you are seeking and desiring further help for your spiritual search. You are most definitely in the right place and on the right track in discovering your own answers through this study. Besides this resource, we also invite

you to visit [www.knowgod.org](http://www.knowgod.org) or text the word PRAY to 949-484-0968 for further help and support.

2—"I have not made a decision for Christ or prayed the prayer Pastor Laurie led people through in the film but I know I am now ready."

If this is your answer, here are two options. First, you can go to [www.knowgod.org](http://www.knowgod.org) or text the word PRAY to 949-484-0968. Second, you can pray the prayer given below that Pastor Laurie prayed in the film.

*"Lord Jesus, I know I am a sinner. But I know that You're the Savior Who died on the cross for my sin and rose again from the dead. I turn from my sin. I'm sorry for my sin. I want to follow You, Jesus, from this moment forward as my Savior and Lord, as my God and my Friend. Thank You, Lord, for loving me. Thank You, Lord, for calling me. Thank You, Lord, for accepting and forgiving me. In Jesus' name, I pray. Amen."*

Congratulations! If you prayed this prayer, you need to let a pastor or trusted Christian friend know about your decision. Tell someone. You can also go to [www.knowgod.org](http://www.knowgod.org) and click on the button that reads "Did you pray to receive Christ?" for help. Don't stay silent—share your decision with someone. (For information on baptism, be sure and read the Appendix at the end of this study.)

3—"I have prayed to receive Christ and begun my relationship with Him so I am wanting to learn more about God and grow in my newfound faith."

Congratulations! You are beginning a new life and we are here to help. (For information on baptism, be sure and read the Appendix at the end of this study.)

Regardless of which of the three groups you identify with, let's move forward.

There are four key areas of the Christian life that, once you start a relationship with Jesus, will be part of your faith journey from now until the day you go to join Him in Heaven. We have put the information into a simple, user-friendly format with headings separating the various topics inside a session. The study is also filled with passages from God's Word, which is now a vital resource for your life and growth as a Christian. We have placed all Scripture in italics to be easily identifiable from the other text. Hang on to this study after you complete it so you can refer back to any questions as you need help and encouragement.

## Session One

### Connecting With God's Heart

In Genesis 2 after God created Adam and Eve, we see the three of them had complete communication and interaction. They literally walked and talked to one another. But once sin entered the man and woman, relationships were severed. That is why Jesus had to become the Answer and the Mediator to bring us back into fellowship with God. So through your decision for Christ, your connection and fellowship with God has been restored. This relationship brings you peace, contentment, and satisfaction that the world cannot offer. Steve McQueen found what he had been desperately searching for in his relationship with Jesus. Connecting with God changed everything. Watch this clip from *Steve McQueen: American Icon*.

**[FILM CLIP: In at 1:12:15 Mel Gibson “We’re all designed ... to Out 1:14:32 “Steve Interview “but my spirit isn’t broken.”]**

Steve McQueen came to know what a relationship with Christ could mean to a hurting and desperate soul, even to a life who seemingly had everything the world had to offer.

As you begin this first session, we want you to try and forget whatever you may have learned before or assumed about prayer. While that statement might sound odd, we simply want you to begin your new relationship with Christ with a clean slate in every way. Here is why: Before coming to Jesus, many people think of prayer as either some sort of cosmic 9-1-1 call for divine help to be used only in dire emergencies *or* some kind of lofty, religious dissertation using spiritual words that no one understands. The bottom line is neither one of these methods are personal and do not indicate a close relationship with God. So, let's go back to square one regarding your communication with God.

## Getting Honest With God

Prayer is simply on-going conversations between you and your Heavenly Father.

One of the most important aspects about prayer as a Christian is you can talk to God as you would your best friend. Christ has made this miracle possible for you. This is not about making God your buddy or diminishing Him into anything less than the Great I Am. But it is to make sure you reflect the kind of relationship we see Christ have with His Father while He was on earth. Jesus' death and resurrection gave us full and total access to God, offering us the same deep connection that we see Him have throughout the Gospels (the Books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John) in the Bible.

Prayer is committing to total honesty and transparency with God about your deepest needs, feelings, and thoughts. Because He is omniscient (sees and knows everything), He already knows what you are thinking, so you simply voice whatever is in your heart as you would to a close friend. Whether you are glad, mad, sad, angry, confused, or hurting, God wants you to just be *you* before *Him*. Because of Christ, you are accepted and approved before a holy God. Go ahead and be completely honest. He can handle anything you need to say and wants to hear what's in your heart.

*So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin. So let us come boldly to the throne of our gracious God. There we will receive his mercy, and we will find grace to help us when we need it most. (Hebrews 4:14-16 NLT)*

When you asked Christ to come into your life, you didn't join a religion but began a relationship. Think about the most important people in your life. What if you occasionally sat down in front of one of them and talked for a few minutes, asking him/her to do some things for you, and then when you were done, you just said goodbye,

got up, and left. If you kept on with this same pattern, how long would the relationship last? How long would you put up with this type of treatment in a friendship?

Well, God is not at all an impatient friend. He won't ever leave you or end the relationship but He wants to engage with you on an ever-deepening level to help you grow and mature in Him. This will only happen as you talk as well as listen to Him. And the great news is this new Friend—Jesus—goes with you everywhere and is available to you anytime! Even when you may stray or walk away at times, He never will. We see this type of divine connection in the Bible all the way back to Moses.

*Inside the Tent of Meeting, the Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend. (Exodus 33:11 NLT)*

Because of Jesus, God sees you no different than Moses and wants this same type of relationship with you. In fact, read this verse out loud switching to present tense and substitute your own name.

*... the Lord speaks to [your name] face to face, as one speaks to a friend.*

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Why do you suppose we tend to make prayer into a very formal and non-personal exercise?
- Why would God want us to be totally honest with Him?
- Share your thoughts on the Hebrews and Exodus verses.

### **Following Jesus' Example in Prayer**

If we are following Jesus, then we must also always follow His example in Scripture. Take a look at Mark 1:35.

*Very early in the morning, while it was still dark, Jesus got up, left the house and went off to a solitary place, where he prayed. (NIV)*

If Jesus Christ, the Son of God and one-third of the Holy Trinity, made a regular practice of going off alone to pray to the Father, we should follow His pattern in our lives to the best of our ability. This regular action that Christ took shows us that prayer is not a religious exercise or a daily box to check on a spiritual to-do list but rather about building a relationship and knowing His will for your life. That is why if you miss a day or two, you don't need to get stuck in guilt, just jump back in. As with a close friend you would reach out and say, "Please forgive me for being out of touch lately. Can we catch up?" Don't ever quit—commit.

In all our lives, there are people that know us very well and can often read what we are thinking and feeling but the way those relationships stay close is through frequent two-way communication. The same is true for your connection with God. Your prayers are vital for your heart to stay in tune with His will for your life the same way that Jesus did.

Jesus' taught specifically about prayer in Matthew 6:5-13.

*"And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the synagogues and on the corners of the streets, that they may be seen by men. Assuredly, I say to you, they have their reward. But you, when you pray, go into your room, and when you have shut your door, pray to your Father who is in the secret place; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you openly. And when you pray, do not use vain repetitions as the heathen do. For they think that they will be heard for their many words. "Therefore do not be like them. For your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. In this manner, therefore, pray:*

*Our Father in heaven,  
Hallowed be Your name.  
Your kingdom come.  
Your will be done  
On earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread.  
And forgive us our debts,  
As we forgive our debtors.  
And do not lead us into temptation,  
But deliver us from the evil one.  
For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen.” (NKJV)*

Let’s review what Jesus taught us about prayer in this passage.

- Don’t make a show of your prayers.
- Prayer is about talking to God, not proving your spirituality to people.
- Jesus was not condemning prayer at church or with other believers but rather encouraging us to always prioritize our private prayers and not pray only in public opportunities. In our relationship with Christ, the public life can only be as strong as the private life.
- Don’t pray empty words that don’t mean anything to you. Share your heart with God.
- There are things in life we need to pray about with others while some things need to be kept between our own hearts and God. The Holy Spirit will show us the difference.

In your prayers:

- Worship God.
- Pray for His will to be done in your life.
- Ask for what you need. Be specific.

- Ask for His forgiveness. Keep your list short.
- Ask for the grace and strength to always forgive those who wrong you. Keep your list short.
- Pray for God’s strength and power to overcome temptation in your life.
- Ask for God’s protection to stay away from Satan.
- Thank God that you live in His kingdom now and in eternity.
- Give Him the glory for His goodness in your life.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Regarding Mark 1:35, how might starting every day in a private prayer time change your focus and attitude, as well as affect your life?
- Discuss the bullet points under the Lord’s Prayer passage. What do these statements teach us about prayer?

### **Learning to Pray Through the Psalms**

In learning to pray, God’s Word is a great place to start. David, the shepherd boy who became king and who God would come to call “a man after my own heart,” offers us great examples throughout the Book of Psalms in how to pray. Therefore, this book of the Bible is a great resource to teach you how to communicate honestly with God. Here are some examples of qualities and emotions connected to David’s prayers.

Honesty and Faith:

*O Lord, hear me as I pray; pay attention to my groaning. Listen to my cry for help, my King and my God, for I pray to no one but you. Listen to my voice in the morning, Lord. Each morning I bring my requests to you and wait expectantly. (Psalm 5:1-3 NKJV)*

Sorrow and Sadness:

*Return, O Lord, and rescue me. Save me because of your unfailing love. For the dead do not remember you. Who can praise you from the grave? I am worn out from sobbing. All night I flood my bed with weeping, drenching it with my tears. My vision is blurred by grief; my eyes are worn out because of all my enemies. (Psalm 6:4-7 NKJV)*

**Joy and Gratitude:**

*I will praise You, O Lord, with my whole heart; I will tell of all Your marvelous works. I will be glad and rejoice in You; I will sing praise to Your name, O Most High. (Psalm 9:1-2 NKJV)*

**Anger and Doubt:**

*How long, O Lord? Will You forget me forever? How long will You hide Your face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, Having sorrow in my heart daily? How long will my enemy be exalted over me? Consider and hear me, O Lord my God. (Psalm 13:1-3a NKJV)*

**Strength and Victory:**

*Now I know that the Lord saves His anointed; He will answer him from His holy heaven With the saving strength of His right hand. Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; But we will remember the name of the Lord our God. They have bowed down and fallen; But we have risen and stand upright. Save, Lord! May the King answer us when we call. (Psalm 20:6-9 NKJV)*

When you aren't sure what to say to God or you are simply out of words to express your heart in a situation, go to the Psalms and read them aloud as your prayer. Make the psalmist's words, your words. As you can see from David and the other psalmists, God invites you to be totally honest with Him in every way at all times.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Why might we be afraid of being as transparent and honest with God as David was?
- How do the Psalms encourage and motivate us in prayer?

### **Listening For and Hearing God's Voice**

While there are those people in Scripture and throughout history who have heard God's audible voice, whether directly or through the message of angels, that is the exception. The normal mode of communication from God, since He is Spirit, is through our spirits. At salvation, His Spirit comes to live in you therefore you can hear His voice. This means we hear His message in our hearts. Jesus spoke of His communication with His followers in John 10:1-5.

*“Let me set this before you as plainly as I can. If a person climbs over or through the fence of a sheep pen instead of going through the gate, you know he's up to no good—a sheep rustler! The shepherd walks right up to the gate. The gatekeeper opens the gate to him and the sheep recognize his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he gets them all out, he leads them and they follow because they are familiar with his voice. They won't follow a stranger's voice but will scatter because they aren't used to the sound of it.” (MSG)*

The Bible often uses sheep as a metaphor for God's people. Jesus assures us that, just as sheep learn to hear and recognize the shepherd's voice, His followers will also learn to know and understand His voice and stay close to Him. And to the contrary, they won't follow a voice they don't recognize. While this takes time to learn and discern, by faith you can and will be able to hear and know God's voice.

One of the big questions new believers often ask is how can I tell the difference between my voice, Satan's voice, and God's voice? Here are a few helpful thoughts to consider.

You are likely hearing your own voice when:

- 1—Your own usual concerns, fears, and plans keep running through your head.
- 2—Your thoughts are chaotic and not clear.
- 3—You hear linear, word-by-word familiar words like a conversation with yourself.

You are hearing the voice of the enemy when:

- 1—The words are condescending and condemning.
- 2—The words are accusing and critical.
- 3—The words are discouraging and demeaning.

One of the greatest disguises and tricks of the enemy is convincing someone that God is speaking when it is in reality the devil lying. He wants us to believe all the wrong things about what God truly thinks of us.

In speaking to your spirit, God will convict you but never condemn you. Conviction from God is when you have a deep sense that something in your life *needs* to change. Condemnation from the enemy is when you feel you are a failure at something that will *never* change.

God will always show you grace and not give you grief. Grace is God's unmerited favor that always offers a new start and a second chance. Grief is the enemy's attack to convince you to give in and give up.

You are likely hearing God's voice when:

- 1—The words line up exactly with the truth of Scripture.
- 2—The words may not make human sense, but great peace comes with the message and overcomes your questions and doubt.
- 3—The words line up with your other godly counsel of those who follow Christ and care deeply for you.

So much of how we listen for and expect answers from God comes from our past spiritual paradigm. If we have viewed God through any sort of negative filter like an abusive or absentee parent, we must let go of those harmful connections and see Him for the perfect Father that He is. Read the words of Jesus as He teaches His followers the correct way to view *Abba*, as He often called God, a word best translated as *Daddy* or *Papa*.

*For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened. If a son asks for bread from any father among you, will he give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will he give him a serpent instead of a fish? Or if he asks for an egg, will he offer him a scorpion? If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask Him!" (Luke 11:10-13 NKJV)*

God will often speak to us much like the unveiling and viewing of a beautiful painting we have never seen before. For example, if you are at a museum and walk up to a classic masterpiece, your eyes will of course view the entire picture. You get the complete image of a painting in one single gaze. Therefore, months, even years later, you can often close your eyes and picture the artwork, as if you were standing there again. The Biblical connection to this concept is how Jesus most often taught God's truth by painting word pictures, such as:

- A city set on a hill (Matthew 5)
- The father at the end of the road embracing his wayward son (Luke 15)
- A shepherd separating sheep from goats (Matthew 25)
- A lady searching her house for a missing coin (Luke 15)
- A widow who won't stop pestering a judge (Luke 18)
- A camel trying to go through a needle's eye (Mark 10)
- A shepherd who leaves 99 sheep to find one (Matthew 18)

And of course, the simple vision of the cross that tells the entire story of the Gospel with a single, solitary image. Throughout Scripture, we have pictures in our mind displaying

the messages of God. Often one word says it all for us, for example, an ark (Noah), a burning bush (Moses), a whale (Jonah), a giant (David), and an empty tomb (Jesus). With only a limited knowledge of the Bible, those single word pictures tell an entire story. Wouldn't it make sense that Jesus would still talk to us in this manner today? After praying or while praying, if you suddenly get an idea or a concept that you know is far past what you could think up or create on your own, this just might be God speaking to you.

Listening for this type of communication from God might help distinguish more clearly between your thoughts and His message. It might help discern the difference between other's well-intended advice and a divine message. The next time you're asking God for an answer, focus less attention on straining to hear a "yes" or "no" and watch for His unveiling picture.

The New Life Bible even paraphrases the word "parables" as "picture-stories." Look at Matthew 10:10, 13-14.

*The followers of Jesus came to Him and said, "Why do You speak to them in picture-stories?" ... "This is why I speak to them in picture-stories. They have eyes but they do not see. They have ears but they do not hear and they do not understand. It happened in their lives as Isaiah said it would happen. He said, 'You hear and hear but do not understand. You look and look but do not see.'*

Jesus used every method He could to communicate the Gospel where people would understand and also remember. In your own life, He wants you to hear and fully grasp His words today just as much as those did who sat on the hillsides listening to Him teach.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Why do you think hearing and discerning God's voice is so difficult for us as humans, even after beginning a relationship with Christ? What are our obstacles?

- Discuss the points under discerning our voice, Satan’s voice, and God’s voice.
- Discuss what Jesus was teaching us in Luke 11:10-13.
- If Jesus could have used any communication method available, why do you suppose He told stories and created word pictures in His teaching?

### **Discerning God’s Will For Your Life**

The Bible is the best way to hear and know God’s voice because He has already said so many things in His Word regarding His will for all our lives. We must also look to His Word to see how He spoke to His people and know He will often repeat those patterns for us. (We will go into more about God’s Word in the next session.)

The prophet Elijah’s life had been threatened so he had run into the wilderness and eventually took shelter in a cave. God spoke to him there. Read this fascinating story.

*And there he went into a cave, and spent the night in that place; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and He said to him, “What are you doing here, Elijah?” So he said, “I have been very zealous for the Lord God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, torn down Your altars, and killed Your prophets with the sword. I alone am left; and they seek to take my life.” Then He said, “Go out, and stand on the mountain before the Lord.” And behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces before the Lord, but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake, but the Lord was not in the earthquake; and after the earthquake a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice. ... Then the Lord said to him: “Go, return on your way ....” (1 Kings 19:9-12, 15a NKJV)*

God was not in the fury of the wind, earthquake, or fire like many would expect Him to be but rather in a still, small voice, like a whisper. The noise of the world today screams at us from all sides in so many voices much like raging wind and fire but God still comes to us in this same way—peaceful, quiet, and reassuring words amidst the clamor of the culture.

As a loving and perfect Father, God has three simple answers for our questions regarding His will—what He desires for us to do or not do.

1—Yes

God gives this answer far more than most people seem to believe. His “yes” also always brings His provision for us, meaning He backs His answer with His resources to complete whatever He gives us permission to do. God meets our needs, grants our heart’s desire, and longs to bless His children. If you find yourself never expecting God to say “yes”, you might want to re-evaluate your personal view of Him.

2—No

Please understand that when God says “no,” this is never punishment or condemnation or judgment, but only protection. We are often like the small child who knows no better than to run into the street and feels like the parent just wants to spoil the fun of freedom. Far, far more than any good parent, God always sees ahead and knows what is best. Therefore, when He tells you “no,” trust that His goodness is alive in your life and there is a valid reason, sometimes many reasons. Most often, if you will keep watch after a “no”, you will eventually see how He protected you and will be very grateful He did not say “yes.”

3—Wait

God's answer of "wait" is a temporary "no" while He allows time for either obedience or the best circumstances to line up. A "wait" is all about His timing. When He deems protection is no longer needed and it is time for His provision, a "wait" turns to "yes." But many times God is waiting on us to grow and mature to the place where we can handle His "yes".

A church marquee sign displayed this message: "Never put a question mark where God has placed a period." With His answers, we must be careful to not assume a "yes" or decide to ignore a "wait" when God has clearly said "no." Think about your own life. You want to say "yes" to those you love but when you have to say "no" or "wait" it is because you have knowledge of the best direction. Just as Jesus said in the Luke 11 passage you read earlier, how much more does your perfect heavenly Father know about your life than you do? Trust Him, no matter what answer you hear.

Waiting on God's answer can also be an area where the enemy comes to repeat exactly what He said to Adam and Eve in the Garden when he asked the woman, "Did God *really* say that?" He will come to us and ask, "Are you sure God told you to wait?" "If He really loved you, He wouldn't have told you no." "He can't say yes to you because you're being punished." Remember—conviction, not condemnation, and grace, not grief.

We all love God's "yes." But the real growth for us comes when He says "no" and "wait". That's where we just have to trust and obey, expressing more faith. Sometimes, we just wouldn't be able to handle "yes" and He knows it, but we don't yet understand why. He always has a strong reason that is ultimately for our best.

To repeat Luke 11:10: *For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened.*

"Ask" and keep asking because God will eventually answer every question.

"Seek" and keep seeking because God will eventually reveal everything that is sought.

“Knock” and keep knocking because God will eventually open every door that He intends to be opened.

But provision or protection always lies on the other side of any question for God’s children. No “stones”. No “snakes”. No “scorpions”. Only good gifts.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Why do you think so many people struggle with God saying, “yes” to them in His answers?
- How does viewing His “no” as protection rather than punishment help us in our perception of God?
- What can we learn from the concept of God’s “wait”?
- How does our level of trust in God factor into how we hear and obey His answers?

### **Helps For Establishing a Daily Time With God**

This section is to guide you through how to practically create the space in your life to spend daily time with God in prayer and Bible reading.

#### 1—Pick a time

While spending time a few moments alone with God first thing in the morning is best to set the pace for your day, choose when will be optimum for your schedule. You may need to experiment a bit, but pick a time and stick with it.

#### 2—Choose a place

You need a quiet and peaceful setting. Get away from distractions. Put away the phone. The right location is crucial for you to be focused and comfortable as you engage with God.

### 3—Read

Before praying, read a passage from your Bible. If this is a new discipline for you, try starting in Psalms or the Gospel of John. Choose the amount of verses that you can take in for your level of spiritual maturity. For some, that might be a chapter while others need to read just a few verses at a time. Allow God’s Word to speak to your heart. He has a customized message for you each day in the Bible.

### 4—Pray

As we have stated throughout this session, allow time to speak with God and tell Him everything as you would a best friend. Just talk to Him. Tell Him your heart. Be honest. Be specific. No fancy, spiritual language is necessary.

### 5—Journal

Journaling is simply writing down your thoughts that come from your time alone with God. Some people like to write out their prayers to stay focused while others write down the things they are learning from Scripture or hear in their prayer time. Journaling is a powerful tool He can use to help you process your spiritual journey. If you continue in this practice, you will be amazed when you look back over time at all that God has done in your life as you read past journal entries.

### 6—Listen & Obey

Close your prayer time with a quiet moment to hear God speak. Be still and know He is God (Psalm 46:10). Quiet your mind and heart and pray the prayer of Samuel: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:10). It is normal to feel a little strange at first as you sit and listen, but if you will stick with this discipline, you will be amazed at what the Holy Spirit will say to you. Then obey what you hear and “walk out” what He tells you each day.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Do you have any questions or comments regarding these six points?
- What are some ways we could keep this time fresh and engaging so it doesn't become a religious exercise?

Hopefully, you now have a better understanding of what prayer truly is and you can begin a lifelong practice of communicating with God to consistently deepen in your relationship with Him and grow in maturity and faith.

Let's close this first session with a verse from the Message Bible that paints a great word-picture of time alone with God.

*“Here's what I want you to do: Find a quiet, secluded place so you won't be tempted to role-play before God. Just be there as simply and honestly as you can manage. The focus will shift from you to God, and you will begin to sense his grace.” (Matthew 6:6, MSG)*

## Session Two

### Connecting With God's Word

Imagine for a moment being God and centuries before all the technology that is available today was created you wanted a way to communicate to your creation from one single source that would span the generations. And you wanted this interaction to be coupled with faith from those who would engage with it. When you consider these factors, an inscribed document or a book not only becomes the only likely possibility but the best one too. Well, that is exactly what the Creator did. That is why the Bible was created and why it has always been known as God's Word from the original scrolls throughout history to today's bound books.

From your own spiritual background, you likely have some thoughts or mental images when you hear the word *Bible*. Everyone seems to have an opinion about this book in so many different ways and extremes—from conviction to controversy, fairy tales to facts, history book to heaven-sent.

In the film *Steve McQueen: American Icon* during the Gospel presentation that you watched in the first session, Pastor Greg Laurie had two things in his hands as he walked up onto the platform to speak—his sermon notes and his Bible. But even his notes were all based on the words he read in his Bible. In the film clip of him speaking to the thousands gathered at the stadium, Pastor Greg quotes from his Bible. The Word of God is the very foundation from which everything the pastor speaks in his message.

In the film, Steve McQueen's own connection to Scripture is discussed. Watch this clip focusing on a very special Bible that Steve received and read in his final days.

**[FILM CLIP: In at 1:05:35 "Billy prayed for Steve ... and Out at 1:06:47 on tight**

**shot of Greg holding the Bible. Bump second clip to this one In at 1:09:55 “After his death ... and Out at 1:10:12 “as he entered eternity.”]**

Isn't it fascinating that of all the amazing things that Steve McQueen held in his hands during his wealthy and powerful days as an international celebrity—the steering wheels of expensive sports cars, coveted industry awards, countless hundred dollar bills, bottles of the world's finest liquor, and even the hands of beautiful models, he died clutching the one thing in this world that had become the most dear to him—the Word of God.

Consider the great value that Pastor Greg and Steve McQueen put on the Bible as you read Psalm 19:7-14.

*The instructions of the Lord are perfect, reviving the soul. The decrees of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The commandments of the Lord are right, bringing joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are clear, giving insight for living. Reverence for the Lord is pure, lasting forever. The laws of the Lord are true; each one is fair. They are more desirable than gold, even the finest gold. They are sweeter than honey, even honey dripping from the comb. They are a warning to your servant, a great reward for those who obey them. How can I know all the sins lurking in my heart? Cleanse me from these hidden faults. Keep your servant from deliberate sins! Don't let them control me. Then I will be free of guilt and innocent of great sin. May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be pleasing to you, O Lord, my rock and my redeemer. (NLT)*

### **Why the Bible is Such an Important But Controversial Book**

Here are just a few major reasons. What other book:

- Claims to be the words of God Himself
- Tells you who God is and how to get to Heaven
- Contains word-for-word, moment-by-moment quotes of God speaking to people

- Details hundreds of miracles that were witnessed by thousands and recorded as documented history
- Offers wisdom and counsel on how God would have us live

Sure, many other books have claimed to be divine in some way but none quite like this one, especially that have stood the test of time. For centuries, many have believed the Bible to be only a book of history, myths, traditional teachings, spiritual fables, and archaic, outdated religious laws and commands. Over the centuries, people have questioned the Bible's accuracy but here are four important facts to consider:

1. Forty authors over 1,400 years are responsible for the final 66 books of the Bible. Scribes originally penned the words onto large parchments contained on heavy scrolls.
2. To maintain accuracy in the copies that were created, when a page was completed the copy was placed onto an original and if the center word on the page did not match up exactly, the copy page was burned and the scribe would start over.
3. Only 400 words are in question in the New Testament regarding their original composition, creating a 99.9 percent accuracy rate. None of those words are related to actual doctrine.
4. 24,000 known copies of the original New Testament are still in existence today, with the oldest copy being only 100 years from the original. Many other known ancient texts span up to 500 years from the original to the oldest copy, allowing for more potential deviation.

[Ref: "How We Got the Bible," *Bible.org*: <https://bible.org/book/export/html/6419>.]

Wycliffe Bible Translators provide the following facts about the current availability of Scripture:

- Approximately 550 languages have the complete translated Bible.
- Approximately 1,300 languages have access to the New Testament and some portions of Scripture in their language.
- Approximately 2,300 languages across 130 countries have active translation and linguistic development work being done today.

[Ref: “Why Bible Translation?” 2015, *Wycliffe*: <https://www.wycliffe.org/about/why>.]

If the Bible is just an invention of the human mind in the search for truth then why, in its formative years was it so meticulously handled with such careful oversight and artistry by so many different people? Even today no other book receives so much global attention and is continually under constant translation in multiple languages with people dedicating years of their lives to the work. No other book has ever had this sort of commitment and scrutiny to produce and provide to every possible nationality and language.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- What was your perception of the Bible before coming to Christ? Explain.
- Why would people want to make the Bible out to be anything other than God’s Word?
- Do the documentation and translation facts help you in your own faith? Explain.

### **Why the Bible is Crucial for the Christian**

Taking all the above facts into consideration, what matters the most now, however, is not

what anyone else believes about the Bible. The most important question is *what do you believe*. Just as you had to come to the decision to place your faith in Jesus Christ for salvation, you must decide if you believe the Bible to be true for yourself. This does not mean you are placing your faith in the Bible as some sort of add-on to Christ but rather, it is the book by which you can find God's words for you and His will for your life as a support to your belief in Christ. In your newfound faith, regularly engaging with the Word of God will be vital to your journey with Him.

There are four different groups regarding the Bible and most people fall into one of these categories. Those who:

- Care nothing about the Bible and would never even consider reading its pages, much less applying the words to their lives.
- Make it their mission to boldly and loudly declare the Bible to be a book of lies and deception, wanting it removed from society altogether.
- Do not believe it is *the* Word of God but respect the words as some kind of sacred text with value for life, like a self-help book or handbook of good advice.
- Believe it is the divinely inspired Word of God and, through the Holy Spirit, can speak into and be applied to bless our lives on a daily basis.

Before you came to Christ, which group would you have most identified?

Which group do you indentify with today?

Regardless of where you have placed the Bible in your past life, we are going to talk about the importance of now being in the fourth and final group. Read and carefully, prayerfully take in these words about the validity and credibility of Scripture. Look for the truths taught about the Word in each passage. Watch for the phrases that tell you what Scripture can and will mean to you personally.

*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates. (Deuteronomy 6:5–9 NIV)*

*Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked or stand in the way that sinners take or sit in the company of mockers, but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, and who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither—whatever they do prospers. (Psalm 1:1–3 NIV)*

*All Scripture is inspired by God and is useful to teach us what is true and to make us realize what is wrong in our lives. It corrects us when we are wrong and teaches us to do what is right. God uses it to prepare and equip his people to do every good work. (2 Timothy 3:16–17 NLT)*

*Because of that experience, we have even greater confidence in the message proclaimed by the prophets. You must pay close attention to what they wrote, for their words are like a lamp shining in a dark place—until the Day dawns, and Christ the Morning Star shines in your hearts. Above all, you must realize that no prophecy in Scripture ever came from the prophet's own understanding, or from human initiative. No, those prophets were moved by the Holy Spirit, and they spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:19–21 NLT)*

These passages are clearly God speaking *to us*, trying to communicate His love and care *for us*. The Bible as God's Word has been provided:

- To mankind
- Through mankind
- For mankind

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Discuss the four Bible passages listed in this section. What do they teach us about the power and impact of Scripture in our lives?
- Is there a verse that jumps out at you or a phrase in one? Explain.

### **What the Bible Offers Us**

1 — The Bible contains God's *prophecy*.

*The Encyclopedia of Bible Prophecy* states there are 1,239 prophecies in the Old Testament and 578 in the New Testament, encompassing 8,352 verses. While we find theologians differing somewhat on the actual number of prophecies that Christ fulfilled, all agree there are direct and exact connections to the majority of them. Here are two great examples—one for Jesus' birth ...

*Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel. (Isaiah 7:14 NKJV)*

Most theologians believe this prophecy was made about 700 years before Christ's birth. Verses such as this were exactly why people were watching and waiting for the Messiah, because while many details of His coming were specific, God didn't say *when* He would come!

And then Jesus' death ...

*My life is poured out like water, and all my bones are out of joint. My heart is like wax, melting within me. My strength has dried up like sunbaked clay. My tongue sticks to the*

*roof of my mouth. You have laid me in the dust and left me for dead. My enemies surround me like a pack of dogs; an evil gang closes in on me. They have pierced my hands and feet. I can count all my bones. My enemies stare at me and gloat. They divide my garments among themselves and throw dice for my clothing. (Psalm 22:14–18 NLT)*

This was written approximately one thousand years prior to Christ’s birth, before the brutal practice of crucifixion was even used! The language obviously describes Christ’s thirst-parched, nail-pierced body, even down to the centurions gambling for his robe at the foot of the cross, as described in Luke 23.

God’s plan was to use these many connections throughout history to prove to us that He is real and His Son is who He said He is.

[Ref: Wayne Jackson, “How Many Prophecies Are in the Bible?” *Christian Courier*: <https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/318-how-many-prophecies-are-in-the-bible.>]

## 2 — The Bible contains God’s *precepts*.

If God created us, then He would also know the best way to live life. His Word would be filled with precepts—commands and rules—to instruct and protect us. The most well known of these are the Ten Commandments found in Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. Jesus was once asked a very interesting question by a religious official about God’s precepts, found in Matthew 22:35–39.

*Then one of them, a lawyer, asked Him a question, testing Him, and saying, “Teacher, which is the great commandment in the law?” Jesus said to him, “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ (NKJV)*

Knowing the Pharisees were trying to trap Him by His own words, Jesus summed up all of God’s laws into this simple concept (paraphrasing): “Love God, love others, and love

yourself—in that order.” God’s precepts all have an ultimate purpose, built on the foundation of His great love.

3 — The Bible contains God’s *principles*.

A principle is a positive guideline by which we may live that can improve our quality of life. Because God is perfect, His laws have powerful principles that drive their meaning. We often get hung up on rules because we feel they are attempts to control us, but God has rules for *our* sake—for our best and our freedom.

Let’s look at two of God’s ten laws—one about Him and one about us—to find the real principle driving His precept.

Exodus 20:3 states, “You shall have no other gods before me.” Many read this verse and believe God to be power-hungry and self-centered. That mindset places human sinful qualities on Him, which He does not have. So we must ask why a loving Creator would tell us to not place anyone before Him. While there are many reasons given and passages provided as proof, read Proverbs 4:10–13:

*My child, listen to me and do as I say, and you will have a long, good life. I will teach you wisdom’s ways and lead you in straight paths. When you walk, you won’t be held back; when you run, you won’t stumble. Take hold of my instructions; don’t let them go. Guard them, for they are the key to life. (NLT)*

God knows anyone or anything else we try to follow will lead us down the wrong path. We were created by Him, and for Him; therefore *He* is our only God.

Let’s look at Exodus 20:13: “You shall not murder.”

Why would the Creator of life tell us not to kill each other? Because the act of murder is driven by hatred to the point of wanting someone dead. Murder is permanently taking

over the authority of someone's life, which we were never meant to have. And the bigger picture is to kill a person is to not love life, and God created us to love each other and be "in His image," a source of life, not death. This principle of always choosing life is the driving force for the sixth commandment.

As He so often did, Jesus took the Old Testament teachings to a deeper place. In Matthew 5:21-22, He warns against starting down the road to murder by avoiding the first step—unrighteous anger.

*"You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment." (NIV)*

A perfect God has perfect *principles*—solid and wise reasons—behind every *precept* drawn from and based on His *prophecies*. This fact makes the Bible an invaluable resource for living a life surrendered to Christ.

4 — The Bible contains God's *promises*.

From prophecy to precepts to principles, we get to the one we tend to like the most—God's promises to us. While there are literally hundreds of promises found throughout Scripture, here are a few often-quoted and familiar ones.

*But those who wait on the Lord Shall renew their strength;  
They shall mount up with wings like eagles,  
They shall run and not be weary,  
They shall walk and not faint.  
(Isaiah 40:31 NKJV)*

*For I, the Lord your God, will hold your right hand,  
Saying to you, 'Fear not, I will help you.'*

*(Isaiah 41:13 NKJV)*

*“For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.” (Jeremiah 29:11 NIV)*

*“And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:20 NLT)*

Once again we see that God desires a relationship with us and tells us clearly throughout Scripture the benefits of following Him in obedience. Look back over these one more time and focus on specific promises He has made and is promising you.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- How do breaking the Bible down into the four P’s—prophecy, precepts, principles, and promises—help us?
- How might better understanding God’s principles behind His precepts help us have a healthier view of Him?
- How do God’s prophecies connect to His promises?

### **How the Bible Can Change Your Life**

There was a day when the idea of every family, let alone every Christian, owning their own Bible would have been unthinkable. In the mid-1400s, Johann Gutenberg developed the first method of mass-produced printing. He printed the Bible on six presses with forty-two lines per page. Approximately two hundred copies were completed with the letters resembling the style of the scribes who had always created copies in the past. By the late 1400s, every European country had at least one printing press. This soon allowed

the Bible to be the most printed book in history, with copies made available for the first time to people other than just scholars and monks. Slowly over time, the Bible became available to all English-speaking people.

[Ref: “1456 Gutenberg Produces the First Printed Bible,” 1990, *Christianity Today*: <http://www.christianitytoday.com/history/issues/issue-28/1456-gutenberg-produces-first-printed-bible.html>.]

Fast-forward to today when Bibles sit on shelves gathering dust in countless Western-culture homes, especially in the United States. Today, if you stacked all the Bibles in American homes on top of each other, they would rise to 29 million feet—nearly one thousand times the height of Mount Everest. According to the Barna Group, more than 90 percent of American households own a Bible and the average family owns three. Today, 1.5 billion Gideon Bibles are in hotel rooms. Year after year, the Bible outsells any other title, regardless of the state of the economy. From these facts we see that availability of the Bible is not a problem in the first-world.

[Ref: Daniel Burke, “How Many Versions of the Bible Do We Really Need?” *Christianity.com*: <http://www.christianity.com/bible/how-many-versions-of-the-bible-do-we-really-need-11639814.html>.]

But we all know that simply owning a book or having it sit in our home doesn’t change anything, especially our lives. What might happen if everyone in America agreed to live by the principles of the Bible, even if they didn’t believe in God, Jesus, or Heaven? Could things in our world be changed simply by people applying the truth of Scripture?

If God’s Word is accurate and trustworthy—if it is truly God’s Word to mankind, alive and used by His Spirit in our lives—this could revolutionize *anyone* who reads and applies its truth from the inside out.

But even if everyone in the nation, your city, community, and neighborhood adjusted their lives to the Bible, this still does not change you. The only way you will change is if you decide for yourself that His Word is the foundation for *your own* life and future. Then you can impact anyone and everyone by the life you lead from the words you read.

While the Bible may not mention your actual name, whenever the words *we*, *our*, and *your*, as well as terms like *children of God* are used, they are about you—they include you. If you know Christ, you are in God’s story!

Every day in every American home, so much of what is delivered to our mailboxes is junk mail—advertisements and offers, mostly wanting our money. The words of these letters and ads are not personal; the messages are not written to us but to whoever opens the envelope. So we toss them out because they aren’t special or meaningful. This is how a lot of people see the Bible—kind of like junk mail.

But then what if you get an envelope in the mail, addressed by hand just to you? You open it, and someone has handwritten you a letter. The words are very personal and intimate. They’re only about you, telling you what you mean to the writer and how much that person loves you. That’s exactly why we call them “love letters.” You keep those, and you read and re-read them. If the Bible is from God, about your life, then that’s how you can see its words—God’s love letter *to* you and *for* you.

But love letters are only love letters if you truly believe the words written by the sender. And they’re the most special when you love the person deeply who wrote you. So what do you believe about the Bible? Just stories or *your* story? Junk mail or love letter? You decide.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Why do you think the Bible is so taken for granted in our culture?
- Why is your own personal view of God’s Word so crucial to your relationship with Him?

- What has to happen in our hearts for the Bible to go from junk mail to a love letter?

### **How God’s Spirit Speaks Through His Word**

*“Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you—they are your life.” (Deuteronomy 32:46-47 NIV)*

This passage tells the believer that the words of Scripture aren’t just optional reading material, but actual words of life from God. This strong statement both encourages and warns us to take His Word very seriously in our lives.

*For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. (Hebrews 4:12 NIV)*

No other book in history has been called a spiritual sword that can go into our lives and do battle to separate our flesh and spirit. God’s Word dives deep into our souls to reveal even our thoughts and attitudes, showing us what must be changed and submitted to God. And we all know that if we can change our attitude, we can change our lives.

Taking these two passages to heart, we must realize that the Spirit of the Creator and Author of this Book comes to us when we read its words to interpret and translate what we need to know on any given day. It’s like reading a book with the author always sitting with you to answer your questions. This is exactly why someone can read the same Bible over decades of life with the *same verses* constantly convicting of *new truth*.

Through the Holy Spirit making the Word come alive in our hearts, we realize that God will never *compromise* His Word for us, meaning no one gets to be the exception to His

rules. But He will *customize* His Word for us, using the words to speak specifically to us in the moment. His precepts, principles, and promises are true for us all. If the Word says it, then it applies to everyone. There is no compromising His Word. No changing rules according to different situations and circumstances. No situational ethics or circumstantial theology. If something was right or wrong for Abraham, Moses, David, Peter, John, and Paul, those same truths apply to us today. The times may change but the Bible applies the same truth to each generation.

If you and I read the exact same verses one morning, His Spirit can apply a custom message to both of us for our lives in that moment. We may get very varied communication out of the same verses. The *meaning* will be the same but the *message* is very different. Because His Spirit interprets His Word to us, it can be used in so many ways.

Here's an example. One person reads Psalm 37:4 NIV, "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart," and hears God saying, "You've been trying to get your joy, your energy for life, from your job by working more and more and that is just not going to happen. Find your life in me." At the same time, another person opens the Bible, reads this verse, and feels God say, "Believe that I want the best for you. Trust me that I will bring good things into your life." The Holy Spirit is customizing or targeting the needed message to each person's heart. What an awesome and personal God!

There are thousands of principles and patterns in the Word for us to follow and live out. There is no compromise in these. Yet there are millions of potential customized messages from Him. This is why consistent Bible reading and study are so important throughout your life. Yes, we should sit under strong Bible teaching, but we must also learn the Scriptures for ourselves as well.

**Discussion Questions:**

- Discuss the *compromise* and *customize* concept.
- Have you had an experience yet where God spoke to you clearly in and through His Word? Share.

### **How Your Bible Connects With Your Prayers**

In the first session on prayer, we walked through how to have a daily time alone with God for the purpose of a constantly growing personal relationship with Him. Let's review a few of those instructions that included the Bible now that you have a broader understanding of Scripture, starting with ...

#### **Step 4—Read**

Before praying, read a passage from your Bible. If this is a new discipline for you, try starting in Psalms or the Gospel of John. Choose the amount of verses that you can take in for your level of spiritual maturity. For some, that might be a chapter while others need only to read a few verses at a time. Allow God's Word to speak to your heart. He has a customized message for you each day.

This step should make even more sense now than when you read it in the first session. Begin a habit of praying to ask the Holy Spirit to guide you in where to read. A great goal would be to eventually go through the entire Bible to have a full understanding of the Word but the best way to do that is to read daily, led by God's Spirit.

Step 5 was Pray.

#### **Step 6—Journal**

Journaling is simply writing down your thoughts that come from your time alone with God. Some people like to write out their prayers to stay focused while others write down

the things they are learning from Scripture or hear in their prayer time. Journaling is a powerful tool He can use to help you process your spiritual walk.

After you read the Bible each day, consider writing down what you sense God may be saying to you or what the Scripture teaches you. Find a personal and practical application from the passage you read. Remember—God will customize His message to your heart.

#### Step 7—Listen & Obey

Close your prayer time with a quiet moment to hear God speak. Be still and know He is God (Psalm 46:10). Quiet your mind and heart and pray the prayer of Samuel: “Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:10). It is normal to feel a little strange at first as you sit and listen, but if you will stick with this discipline, you will be amazed at what the Holy Spirit will speak to you. Then obey what you hear and “walk out” what He tells you each day.

With your prayers interacting with Scripture, God’s Spirit will speak to you and they will always agree. These disciplines coupled with your obedience will be powerful throughout your life.

*Your word is a lamp to my feet*

*And a light to my path. (Psalm 119:105 NKJV)*

#### **Discussion Questions:**

Do you have any questions regarding the interaction between your prayers and your Bible reading?

#### **Wrap-Up:**

Hopefully you now have a better and broader grasp of why God's Word is so important to your life. But no matter how incredible your life gets or how dark your days may become, always remember that God's Word is the light that shines on your way to strengthen and encourage you to keep following Jesus.

## Session Three

### Connecting With God's Community

Steve McQueen had risen to the pinnacle of the entertainment world. He was deemed “The King of Cool” and fully immersed himself in the depths of the Hollywood culture. McQueen officially “had it all” and the whole world knew it. Well, everyone except Steve. He couldn't seem to find his place in this community he had worked so hard to fit into. Money, fame, and power didn't help; in fact, it only complicated everything. So he did what few have ever had the bravery to do. Steve McQueen left Tinsel-Town and went in search of a new home; a different connection in an authentic community. At the time, he had no idea where this journey would take him, and while he couldn't seem to find it, it would most certainly find him. Because Someone had been pursuing Steve all his life and was about to catch him, just like one of his own infamous chase scenes in a movie.

Take a look at this film clip from *Steve McQueen: American Icon*.

**[FILM CLIP: In at 2:57 “The year was 1979... to Out at 4:07 “still something missing.” Bump to In at 55:39 airplane landing on strip to Out at 57:23 “that’s when I accepted Christ.”]**

Steve McQueen left the spotlight and red carpet to literally find himself, of all places, in the balcony of a small church. There he joined a new community and found a family that cared about him, not his fame. But most importantly, Steve traded in his identity of “king of cool” for “child of the King.” And everything started to change.

So many people today in this fast-paced, chaotic world live in isolation. And many Christians today follow this same hectic and desolate pattern in the culture. Sure, we may smile and say “hi” in the hallways or shake hands during the welcome time at church, all

the while posting pictures and thoughts on social media to display the best side of ourselves. But increasingly, we don't and won't engage on a true heart level with those in our circles of influence. We are neglecting and missing the kind of deep spiritual connection we see with Jesus and His disciples, as well as in the early church after His ascension to Heaven. But God wired all humans with the same innate need for community, with the end goal of real communion together with Him and fellow believers. Steve McQueen found the community of Christ in a little town in California.

### **The Community Where You Belong**

As a new follower of Jesus Christ, the very first community to which you now belong and are eternally connected is the Holy Trinity—God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. You are now His adopted child. You are forever a part of this union. You may still live on the Earth but your citizenship is now in Heaven.

*But we are citizens of heaven, where the Lord Jesus Christ lives. And we are eagerly waiting for him to return as our Savior. (Philippians 3:20 NLT)*

Do you hear the awesome sense of connection and belonging these verses reflect?

In John 15, Jesus uses an agricultural analogy as He often did to help us understand how closely we are connected to the Father in community through a relationship with Him.

*“I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn't produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. Anyone who does not remain in me is*

*thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father. (John 15:1-8 NLT)*

A tree or a vine cannot eat its own fruit. The fruit is a by-product of the life of the plant and is produced for others. The same is true for us. God will produce fruit—good things in our lives—to bless others as we remain in Him and are blessed by being in Him. Our fruit is a by-product of our lives as believers and brings a witness for God and glory to Him. God’s fruit in us is not to be hidden in isolation but shared through community. The fruit from a vine on a desert island will just rot and fall off. The fruit from a vine in a public garden will be admired, shared, consumed, and enjoyed.

While you will likely make new Christian friends in many settings, the primary place for you to find this new community and fellowship will be in a local church. Finding a solid church that focuses on Christ, His Word, and Biblical community is vital to your continued growth.

When we are adopted into God’s community through Christ, then He will:

- Graft us into Him like a branch to a vine
- Prune (discipline and challenge) us to grow and produce much fruit in Him
- Allow us to remain, abide, live from Him, and in Him forever
- Produce God’s glory (renown and honor) from our lives

There is no question that our western-thinking, first-world culture breeds an I-can-take-care-of-myself, pull-myself-up-by-my-own-bootstraps, every-man-for-himself mentality that pervades the world today. But ministering to others, and allowing others to minister to us, is a major component of the Christian life.

Following Jesus' return to Heaven on the Day of Pentecost, Peter preached his first message about Christ and over 3,000 people responded. A new community was born—one unlike the world had ever experienced. God's Spirit moved among the people, changing minds and hearts as well as behavior.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Discuss Jesus' teaching in John 15. Why would he use the vine and branch analogy to bring understanding to belonging and unity?
- How is the concept of belonging to a community of people being lost in our culture?
- How might this problem actually become an attraction to people today in becoming a Christian?

### **Six Activities Alive in a Biblical Community**

Take a look at a passage that best describes the first days of the early church following Jesus' ascension.

*All the believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, and to fellowship, and to sharing in meals (including the Lord's Supper), and to prayer. (Acts 2:42 NLT)*

Let's take a look at this verse in greater detail and the six activities to which this new community devoted themselves.

#### 1—Sound Teaching

This would have been a convergence of all of Christ's teachings, lessons learned from

His life and miracles, along with the Old Testament scrolls available to them at that time. The goal would have been to understand God’s Word and apply the principles to daily life. Their focus could not be simply on gaining knowledge because before He ascended, Christ told them to go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and then to teach them to obey His commands (Matthew 28:18-19). Overwhelming historical evidence proves this teaching became a reality for these believers as they literally changed the known world through their unwavering commitment. The disciples’ teaching had a profound purpose toward action, just as Jesus’ teaching did.

Therefore in this community, known best to us today as the church, we must also connect with sound and solid Biblical teaching that results in practical action. While it is certainly great to go through studies such as this one or other curriculum, all core activity of the Christian community should be focused on Scripture—discussing, processing, sharing thoughts and questions through the teaching, reading, and studying of God’s Word together. This community should also be a safe place for doubts and fears to be expressed and resolved, as well as inspiration and motivation for the victorious life in Christ.

Sound teaching in the days of the disciples all the way to today revolves around the truth of Scripture. Your personal Bible reading and study can connect to the larger context of the Word being taught in and through a Christian community. These will thread through your life to bring you to greater and stronger maturity.

## 2—Fellowship

Gathering together regularly in community kept the early believers strong and strategic. They went far past simply “hanging out.” They lived connected lives, sharing and caring for one another. They experienced synergy—together, they were much stronger than the sum of the individuals. Everyone had a place and a role. This is one of the many reasons God’s people are often referred to as the “body of Christ.”

As a new believer you need to be in consistent and authentic fellowship with other Christians. Essentially, this simple concept just means you truly know fellow believers in a deep relationship. You regularly go past the surface and move ever deeper together. Our busy culture is rapidly losing this ability to commune with one another. A knee-to-knee, heart-to-heart conversation will never be replaced by a text, tweet, “like,” or any digital encounter. While God can most certainly use social media surrendered to Him, He still works best face-to-face. The early church didn’t build on shallowness and neither can we. There must be care, respect, and genuine love for one another. An analogy regarding relationships would be that our culture encourages playing in the shallow end of the pool while Christ invites us to dive into the deep end.

### 3—Sharing Meals

*They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity. (Acts 2:46 NLT)*

While we may view this as just an optional part of fellowship today, the Biblical culture saw this activity as a necessary aspect of friendship, hospitality, and intimacy. Sharing food with each other was also practical and sometimes necessary for everyone in the community to be able to eat. The early church’s inner circle was *any* fellow believer, as they ministered outwardly to *all*. They took care of their faith family and then the family reached out together to grow. Historically, one of the reasons for the rapid growth of the early church was that they would take in, nurture, and care for victims of deadly contagious diseases when even their own families would kick them out in fear. This selfless ministry gave the church a reputation for sacrificial love that created a deep sense of loyalty from those who were healed. If they were welcomed into the community even as a threat of disease and death, then recovered, they would devote their lives to serve with their new brothers and sisters.

Like any close family or group of dear friends, gathering around the table for a meal is an intimate encounter where a personal and spiritual dynamic occurs like no other setting.

Laughter and light-hearted fun can mark these events and create a unique bond for group members. These are also excellent doorways to invite others to enter into the fold.

Think about your own relationships and inner circles. There are people you will hang out with over coffee at a public place. But then there are those in an even smaller circle that you will sit around a dinner table in a home and share together for hours. As a new believer, you need fellow Christ-followers in all areas of your life to grow and mature in your spiritual journey.

#### 4—Prayer

Talking to, listening for, and resting in God’s presence together became as vital to the early church as breathing air. They literally had no direction without God speaking to them corporately. They waited on His voice and didn’t move forward until they heard from Him together.

Take a look at the words of a documented corporate prayer in Scripture that was lifted up as the disciples and new believers gathered together.

*“And now, O Lord, hear their threats, and give us, your servants, great boldness in preaching your word. Stretch out your hand with healing power; may miraculous signs and wonders be done through the name of your holy servant Jesus.” (Acts 4:29-30 NLT)*

Now read the very next verse and how God answered ...

*After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness. (Acts 4:31 NLT)*

We could certainly learn from this level of dependence and desperation today. We must also take the time to go together with other believers before the throne of God for each other, our families, church, and circles of influence. There is an intimate strength gained

through open, unhurried, and bold prayer times, anticipating His answer. We can celebrate God's victories together and cry out to Him in crises as well. Nothing is too small for your community to pray about and nothing too big either. God cares about all the details of our lives.

## 5—Sharing Life and Possessions

*All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. (Acts 4:32 NLT)*

Throughout the Book of Acts, there was a deep sense of joy and satisfaction that came from helping and serving one another. Christ had taken great care of His disciples, so His example continued on into their everyday lives. This was a community involved regularly in pro-active service.

If there are 50 houses on a middle-class street today, how many lawn mowers are there? Likely 50. To apply a modern-day analogy to this community, how many mowers would the early church have needed based on these verses? Two or three, maybe? You get the picture.

While this is much harder to grasp in our materialistic culture, the best way to apply this teaching today is to always be ready to share and give what the Holy Spirit tells you to share and give. When we understand that God owns 100% of all we have been given because He is the Giver and we are merely stewards, we will hold onto things in life much more loosely. Sometimes God gives us things He intends for us to keep while other times He gives us something just to give away. Only through a daily relationship with Him can we know the difference.

*What good is it, dear brothers and sisters, if you say you have faith but don't show it by your actions? Can that kind of faith save anyone? Suppose you see a brother or sister who has no food or clothing, and you say, "Good-bye and have a good day; stay warm*

*and eat well”—but then you don’t give that person any food or clothing. What good does that do? So you see, faith by itself isn’t enough. Unless it produces good deeds, it is dead and useless. (James 2:14-17 NLT)*

## 6—Worship

*They worshiped together at the Temple each day, met in homes for the Lord’s Supper, and shared their meals with great joy and generosity. (Acts 2:46 NLT)*

First, note they worshipped in the Temple “each day”, not just for an hour on Sunday. Worshiping God and expressing gratitude for all Jesus had done became a regular and active part of life for the believers. Their focus wasn’t on musical styles, catchy choruses, instruments, the size of the choir, the color of the carpet, or who was leading that day; it was solely on gathering to express love and praise to Jesus—together. Their deepening relationships with God and one another brought a strong desire to share worship as a community.

Now, of course you can’t be at your church or hanging out with your Christian friends 24/7. As a new Christian, your life is still going to have many of the same mundane, day-to-day aspects as you have always had, but a new dimension has been added to your life that will take commitment and intentionality. Worshiping with other believers is a powerful and inspiring experience. Actually, it’s also great practice for Heaven. But all too often in our entertainment-driven society, this activity can become about things other than expressing gratitude and glory to God. We want to encourage you to always keep your worship, whether in a living room with two others or an arena with thousands, personal and focused on one thing—expressing your love for the Lord.

Take a look at Isaiah’s glimpse into Heaven and the description of the worship.

*It was in the year King Uzziah died that I saw the Lord. He was sitting on a lofty throne, and the train of his robe filled the Temple. Attending him were mighty seraphim, each*

*having six wings. With two wings they covered their faces, with two they covered their feet, and with two they flew. They were calling out to each other, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of Heaven’s Armies! The whole earth is filled with his glory!” (Isaiah 6:1-3 NLT)*

Take a few minutes to look back over these six elements we have discussed in the early church. Ask yourself where you still need to connect and where you need to simply grow.

1. Sound Teaching
2. Fellowship
3. Sharing Meals
4. Prayer
5. Sharing Life and Possessions
6. Worship

**Discussion Questions:**

- Was there one of these six activities that intrigued you, or have a comment or question about any?
- How do these six things work together to produce a strong Biblical community?
- What might be a struggle in our culture today to grasp these activities?
- Now to the other side, what might be an attraction to these?

**Four Elements Produced in a Biblical Community**

As the church took part in all these on-going and interwoven activities, this passage says that four distinct elements were produced:

## 1—Awe

*A deep sense of awe came over them all ... (Acts 2:43a NLT)*

God's work was being witnessed and experienced in their midst every day. This produced an almost indescribable response from the people of God as well as the surrounding community. This unexplainable activity drew more and more people to the faith. When we read these verses its hard to imagine someone *not* wanting to be a part of this movement!

In the story of Christ's birth, just like the shepherds suddenly had their typical night with the sheep interrupted by a visitation of angels, God's Spirit will intervene, often unannounced to bring His life into your life in amazing and incredible ways. Pray for those moments to come. Watch for them. He will speak to you. He will move in your life.

## 2—Miracles

*... and the apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders. (Acts 2:43b NLT)*

Although Jesus had ascended to Heaven, the apostles had taken on His ministry to the people, seeing His Spirit do the same work He had done, now through them. Jesus had shared some truths with the disciples that they did not understand at the time, but by this point they certainly did.

*"I tell you the truth, anyone who believes in me will do the same works I have done, and even greater works, because I am going to be with the Father." (John 14:12 NLT)*

As we stated in the awe section, God desires to use your life in mighty ways. It is vitally important to understand that we do not determine when, where, how, and to whom God will perform a miracle. While yes, God could work through you to produce some

amazing things, we must keep in mind that sharing the Gospel, feeding the poor, helping a neighbor, and the simple ways to serve Christ can be everyday miracles because they are done in the power and name of Jesus. When the supernatural meets the natural in Christ—that is always a miracle. Oftentimes the reason we hear of great works being done overseas in foreign lands is because those missionaries are living out their daily lives just to serve people in the name of Jesus, and in that setting, God indeed shows up every time in a miraculous way.

If you live your life surrendered to Christ and pray daily to be obedient, you will be awed by the miracles He will produce in your life and those you will serve in His name.

### 3—Goodwill of the People

*... all the while praising God and enjoying the goodwill of all the people(Acts 2:47a NLT)*

What God was producing in their midst brought ministry to the watching world. At anytime in history, a community of unselfish, giving, and joyful people who genuinely love each other and everyone around them is going to draw attention, as well as invite intrigue and appreciation. This certainly became the case for the early believers, particularly those who were suffering or hurting and were ministered to regardless of who they were.

While you will certainly have people oppose and challenge your faith, you will likely find that the majority of people will appreciate the fact that you live out your faith in kindness and gentleness through the love and grace of Christ.

### 4—Numerical and Nurturing Growth

*And each day the Lord added to their fellowship those who were being saved. (Acts 2:47 NLT)*

A wise pastor once said, “If we take care of the depth, God will take care of the breadth.” In other words, just like the early church, if we focus on deepening in our relationship with God and one another, He will grow the number in the community of believers. A strong, healthy church will have both numerical and nurturing growth. Yet today, we too often see the focus only on width—numbers—while maturity is just as crucial for the church so the Gospel can be passed on to the next generation. It would be an understatement to say that in the years following Christ the church exploded in growth. In fact, the only reason we know the Gospel today is because of the deep commitment of those early followers.

As with the early church, these four elements—awe, miracles, goodwill of the people, growth—can create a:

- Common bond of love for God and each other, unlike any other social circle
- Overwhelming desire to put each other before self; to meet needs and share life
- Strong draw to regularly gather because the value has been recognized and realized by all
- Deep sense of worship for God and gratitude for relationships now formed for eternity
- Corporate and individual calling to see others come into the Kingdom and experience community

**Discussion Questions:**

How does the obedience of the community of believers in the six elements factor into these four outcomes?

How do these four outcomes actually depend on God rather than on the community?

Discuss the concept of “If we take care of the depth, God will take care of the breadth.”

## **The Results of Biblical Community**

Biblical community is:

- An experience, not an exercise
- A get-to, not a have-to
- Not a church program, but a circle of Christ-friends
- A reflection of the Trinity, the Oneness of God
- A window for the world to see Jesus

We’re going to take a seemingly very different turn in this study now, but we will then bring the point back around full circle. To do so, we’re going back to the beginning.

*At one time all the people of the world spoke the same language and used the same words. As the people migrated to the east, they found a plain in the land of Babylonia and settled there. They began saying to each other, “Let’s make bricks and harden them with fire.” (In this region bricks were used instead of stone, and tar was used for mortar.) Then they said, “Come, let’s build a great city for ourselves with a tower that reaches into the sky. This will make us famous and keep us from being scattered all over the world.” But the Lord came down to look at the city and the tower the people were building. “Look!” he said. “The people are united, and they all speak the same language. After this, nothing they set out to do will be impossible for them! Come, let’s go down and confuse the people with different languages. Then they won’t be able to understand each other.” In that way, the Lord scattered them all over the world, and they stopped building the city. That is why the city was called Babel, because that is where the Lord confused the people with different languages. In this way he scattered them all over the world.*

*(Genesis 11:1–9 NLT)*

At the Tower of Babel, God scattered the people by confusing their language because they were trying to operate their lives without Him. In Acts 2, He did the very opposite because the people were completely focused on Him. While the Holy Spirit did come upon the disciples gathered in Jerusalem, an important point to understand is that people had traveled there from all over the known world for the Jewish harvest festival called Pentecost, where people brought gifts and offerings before the Lord. There were not only people present who spoke different languages, but also different dialects of the same language. Let's look at Acts 2:7–12.

*They were completely amazed. "How can this be?" they exclaimed. "These people are all from Galilee, and yet we hear them speaking in our own native languages! Here we are—Parthians, Medes, Elamites, people from Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus, the province of Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, and the areas of Libya around Cyrene, visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism), Cretans, and Arabs. And we all hear these people speaking in our own languages about the wonderful things God has done!" They stood there amazed and perplexed. "What can this mean?" they asked each other. (NLT)*

Whereas God confused the language at Babel to stop the people, here He united the specific languages needed for all to hear the message in one place together. Each dialect spoke of one message: the Gospel to unite God's people.

Today in our world, does it often feel like we are reliving Babel or Pentecost?

The great news of the Gospel is that we can share, as well as receive, this same message with others. But even more specifically, we can speak each other's language and understand one another's heart through the power of the Holy Spirit. We can speak the language of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, and self-control. All of our words can flow through the dialect of the truth of Christ.

As Christians in our politically correct and don't-offend-anyone culture, we must remember the first language we are called to speak and hear is that which Jesus speaks. We hear His truth above all other voices. The unity and community the early church experienced was not of this world, so such communication will be supernatural for us as well.

So how can we go from Babel to Pentecost—from divided to unified?

We've looked in detail at how the early church did an amazing job of accomplishing this goal. A major goal of any Christian community is to learn how to speak the language of Jesus, to move into an understanding of two things:

1—Our individual limitations

2—Our strengths together

This will then offer opportunity for:

1—Personal humility (not relying on ourselves)

2—Interdependence on biblical community (relying on other believers)

**Discussion Questions:**

- How could committing to be a part of a Biblical community make going to church into an experience, not an exercise, and a get-to, not a have-to?
- Discuss the Babel to Pentecost comparison. How or why was language such a critical part of both these experiences?

- Discuss the idea of individual limitations versus our strengths together, and also personal humility versus interdependence on biblical community.

**Wrap-up:**

Just like those in the early church, your life in Christ will be a constant balance of living in community with other believers for strength, unity, and accountability while also staying connected to non-believers for the purpose of reaching a lost and dying world in desperate need of answers, just as you once were. That is the DNA of the Christian community.

## Session Four

### Connecting With God's Calling

We have now discussed the importance of prayer, the Bible, and Biblical community in depth. All three of these aspects of the Christian life are about you and growing your relationship with God as well as connecting to other believers. This last and final session is going external—outside your own life, Christian circles, and the church—reaching out through your new calling in Christ.

Consider this truth: As a Christian, you believe that once Christ is in your life, then when you die you go to Heaven to be with Him forever. So here's an important question: Why doesn't God take you there as soon as you believe in Him? At the moment you trust Jesus, why don't you go on to Heaven? The only possible answer is that God has a mission for you to accomplish in the rest of your days. Your life on Earth now has a purpose and a calling from Him. God wants you and He to partner together to reach others, just as you were reached with the Gospel. This has been Plan A for spreading the Gospel throughout history—with no Plan B.

*For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. (John 3:16-17 NKJV)*

But here is where you come in ...

*But how can they call on him to save them unless they believe in him? And how can they believe in him if they have never heard about him? And how can they hear about him unless someone tells them? And how will anyone go and tell them without being sent?*

*That is why the Scriptures say, “How beautiful are the feet of messengers who bring good news!” (Romans 10:13-15 NLT)*

Through the film *Steve McQueen: American Icon*, Steve’s testimony will reach an incredible number of people with the transforming power of the Gospel. People will connect to McQueen’s story on so many levels. While few have experienced the kind of fame and success he did, everyone relates to the nagging and driven feeling that life has to be about *something more*.

But God needed someone to reach Steve McQueen; someone that Steve would respect and see authenticity after his disillusionment in Hollywood. Enter God’s man—Sammy Mason. Sammy would have a profound impact on the biggest star in the world at that time. Watch this clip from the film.

**[FILM CLIP: In at 52:15 “So he was given the name of Sammy Mason....” and Out at 54:47 “Well, Steve, I’m a born again Christian.”]**

Meeting Sammy changed the course of Steve’s life. Then Sammy introducing Steve to Jesus completed changed McQueen’s entire life.

God has a calling on your life to reach people as well, those whom no one else can or will. This session is all about you understanding and accepting your calling to follow Him and share His love and grace with others in your own journey, just as Sammy Mason did with Steve McQueen. Whether you reach 10 or 10,000 in your lifetime, God wants to involve you in His great story that He is writing in eternity. Imagine the reunion of Steve and Sammy in Heaven. Then imagine seeing someone in Heaven that you know you had a direct impact upon. There is no greater work in all of history than cooperating with God to help Him populate Heaven.

**Your Story in His-Story**

God made a one-of-a-kind masterpiece when He formed your being. No one else has your look, gifts, skills, personality, talents, and even ideas, thoughts, and actions. Everything about you is unique to you. God even gave you a set of fingerprints that no one else in the world has had or will ever have. So no one else has your story either. The circumstances and details regarding your life and how you came to know Christ are just as special as you are.

Your story of how you came to Christ matters. Matters to you and to God. And it will certainly matter to those whose lives will be forever changed that will *witness* how the Gospel is alive in your life and also *hear* the Gospel through you.

One way to truly come to believe this truth is to realize that once Jesus has saved you, then *your* story becomes *His* story. God has given you a testimony that needs to be shared, that He wants you to share. Your story of salvation and transformation now belongs to God so He can tell you:

- With whom to share your story
- When to share your story
- Where to share your story
- What to share of your story in each situation

The event where Christ enters our lives and saves us from our sin is known as *salvation*. But then after that occurs, a new process starts that doesn't end until you go to Heaven. The Bible calls that *transformation*.

As transformation begins to take place in our lives, what is happening on the inside starts to show on the outside. A new life centered on Christ begins from the inside out. Therefore, transformation is a lifelong progression of constant change. Read these Bible verses that talk about this new lifestyle.

*Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will. (Romans 12:2 NIV)*

*Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:17-18 NIV)*

God transforms how we think as He renews our minds by His Spirit. Changing our thinking eventually changes our behavior, which then changes our lives. Living out our salvation is called our testimony. It's like a witness who testifies in court because he or she has firsthand experience of a situation. Our Christian testimony declares to the world that Jesus is Who He said He was and is, because we've witnessed and experienced both His life and work in our own lives.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- How does accepting that your story in Christ has now become His-story take the pressure off you and make sharing with someone a joy and privilege?
- Why or how would it be best to listen to God regarding the “who, what, where, and when” of telling your story to people?
- How does God's continual transformation in us affect our testimony about Him?

### **Becoming a Translator**

As we experience the process of transformation in our lives and we live out our testimony, we become *translators* for Christ, like we discussed in the Babel vs. Pentecost

section in the last session. But let's go a bit deeper here.

Much like a translator of a foreign language, there are people that don't know Christ whose "language" and "dialect" you will be able to speak. Not like English or Spanish, but a heavenly connection because of experience, background, or interest. You can, through the power and direction of the Holy Spirit, speak their "language," find their "doorway" to spiritual matters, and introduce someone to Jesus. For example, an athlete can talk about sports and understand the desires and goals of an athlete. Therefore, an athlete can best share Christ with other athletes. A recovered addict can often best deal effectively with addicts and share Christ with them because he or she knows first-hand about the heart and mind of someone that struggles with addiction. Who might best share Christ with an 18-year-old? The answer: another 18-year-old because of peer connection. People will hear and receive the message of the Gospel differently based on their own life experiences. Some through words, some through actions, and some through example. God's Holy Spirit wants to direct and lead you as you speak His language into your world and circles of influence.

For example, God knew that Steve McQueen wouldn't be reached by someone trying to just speak the right words to him, because to Steve, talk was cheap. He needed to *see* Christ lived out daily in someone's life. To the point that he finally just asked Sammy what made him so different from anyone Steve had ever met. Sammy was speaking Steve's language by his example.

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us (2 Corinthians 5:17-20 NIV).*

An ambassador is a person who travels to another nation and speaks on behalf of a country's leader. The ambassador does not sit down with presidents, prime ministers, and even kings and say whatever he or she feels or wants, but only what the leader who sent the ambassador has instructed. That person is simply a messenger who has a relationship with the leader, is entrusted with representing that leader, and delivers the leader's message.

In verse 20, Paul says that as Christians we are now "Christ's ambassadors" and God is "making his appeal through us." It is not our appeal but God's. This is why whether someone accepts or rejects the message of the Gospel, it is God to whom they are responding, not us. This verse gives you a fresh perspective as to why you are here on Earth. If you have ever asked the question: "Why am I here? What is my life about?" The answer is the God of the universe wants you to be His ambassador!

Over the course of your life, no matter how many times you tell people what Christ has done for you, each circumstance will be a little different, dependent on the person and the setting. Not that your story changes but some details might matter to one person that won't to another. For example, you may have gone through a specific struggle with an issue that would be an important connecting point to some people. Specific details that relate to the person will matter to include or emphasize in your story. Sometimes God may prompt you to bring up a point and you may not understand why until you realize the person needed to hear that particular topic.

You will be amazed how God will take your testimony and customize it to fit exactly what each person needs to hear. Think about all the many different ways Jesus taught the same truth about the kingdom of God coming to Earth, whether to a few at a dinner table or thousands on a hillside. Your story about Him will be no different as He uses you to reach people.

**Discussion Questions:**

- How does Steve McQueen’s story of being reached by Sammy Mason show us the importance of *how* someone hears about Christ?
- Why might different people respond to the Gospel in different ways?
- Discuss the 2 Corinthians 5 passage. How does this affect your sense of purpose in life?

### **Telling Your Story**

Many people are alive today because a total stranger saved his/her life. Someone took a couple of hours out of their busy lives and received training in CPR (cardio-pulmonary resuscitation). Then, at the right place at the right time in a desperate situation, the trained person jumped into action, applied the newfound skills, and saved someone. As Christians, we have the ability to be used in God’s ministry of saving souls. To be clear—we don’t *save* anyone but we *share* with anyone.

Salvation is not a secret; it’s about sharing. We must speak His language to those who need to hear the good news of the Gospel. Why else would God leave us here after He has fitted us for Heaven? He gives us the privilege of translating His message to the world. All our lives are telling a story about Jesus. If we claim that He is Lord and Savior, then we are telling the world about Him *somehow*. The question is what is our life actually saying?

How would you respond if a friend asked you how to become a Christian? Telling someone about Jesus is simply a matter of you sharing your story of how Christ saved you. You don’t have to say everything perfectly or have all the answers. The goal is to share how Jesus changed you. Remember—someone may want to argue about the existence of God or Who Jesus is but no one can debate what has *actually happened* in your life. This is exactly why sticking to your story and what God has done in your life is

the best approach. No one has ever been debated into the Kingdom of God but, just like Steve McQueen, the majority has been drawn in by authentic love.

So many people in the world today do not know Jesus simply because no one has told them yet, just as Paul stated in Romans 10. Even the most trained and knowledgeable theologian might know *what to say* to lead a person to Christ, but never open his/her mouth to *share*. So the real key isn't knowledge, but obedience. It's about availability, not ability.

When someone posts on social media, he/she is telling the world a story. But we must think about what we are sharing and showing the world with our very lives. We must be intentional with the time and resources with which God has blessed us. Regardless of your presence on social media, there is one story we want to help you tell in every way possible. We're going to take some time now to help you work out how you can share your story about Jesus. We're going to give you a very simple and effective way to translate Christ's love to a lost world. I want to encourage you to write down these four sentences and then take the time to write out your own answers for your personal testimony.

Step One—In a few sentences, write out what your life was like before you began a relationship with Christ.

Step Two—In a few sentences, write down how you came to know Jesus. What were the circumstances around your salvation? Include any key relationships of people that helped you.

Step Three—Write down what God has done in your life since that day and how your life has changed or transformed.

Step Four—Write down how God is working in your life today. A testimony isn't just about the day you were saved, but what He is actively doing in you today. How you came

to know Christ will never change but this part of your story will always be evolving as you experience more and more of God. The awesome aspect of including what God is doing today is two-fold:

1—Sharing your current testimony shows your relationship with God is an ongoing and active part of your life—not just an experience that happened in the past but a powerful present-day relationship.

2—Sharing your current testimony shows the other person how God is actively involved daily in the lives of His followers. This step shows God is not “somewhere up there” or distant but always close and caring in everyday details. In today’s chaotic culture, this can be a very comforting and peaceful connection for people to make.

Now think about how you would use what you have written down in a clear and concise manner to share the Gospel with someone in just a few minutes. Consider asking a Christian friend to let you share your story with them to get comfortable with this.

After sharing with someone, if he/she asks you questions, this can be your approach:

1—If you know the answer to a question, speak honestly from your heart about your own experience. Use your Bible or a Bible app on your phone, if needed.

2—If you don’t know the answer to a question, tell the person that you aren’t sure but will find out or lead him/her to someone who can answer. Few people are going to expect you to be a spiritual expert, so just be yourself and be straightforward. But be sure you get their answer and follow up.

If the person asks how he/she can come to know Christ the way you did, you have two options:

1—Lead the person through a prayer, just as you prayed when you became a believer. Remember, there’s no magic formula or special words. Salvation is a confession of the heart, not a recitation of the mind. Speak your heart and have the person speak his/hers. You can’t go wrong with that approach. Pastor Greg Laurie’s prayer is in session one if you would like to refer back to his.

2—If you are uncomfortable with leading the person through a prayer, ask him/her to meet with you and a pastor or other Christian leader you trust. Again, just be honest.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Was there any part of writing out your testimony that was a struggle for you? Why?
- How could having a concise version of your story make it easier for you to share with people?
- Would anyone like to share your story that you wrote down?

### **By Faith**

In Hebrews 11, we see this repeated phrase with many names: “By faith . . . “

By faith, Abel ...

By faith, Enoch ...

By faith, Noah ...

By faith, Abraham ...

By faith, Isaac ...

By faith, Jacob ...

By faith, Joseph ...

By faith, Moses ...

By faith, Rahab ...  
By faith, Gideon ...  
By faith, Barak ...  
By faith, Samson ...  
By faith, Jephthah ...  
By faith, David ...  
By faith, Samuel ...  
By faith, the Prophets ...

Now listen to the conclusion of this chapter in verses 39-40 ...

*And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us. (NKJV)*

See the phrase “that they should not be made perfect apart from us”? The *us* is us! You are in that number. God wants you to be added to this list—this Hall of Fame of His followers of faith.

Write down the phrase “By faith”, then write in your first name.

Next, write down what you would want God to write about you. Dream big! Step out in your faith. Regarding your relationship with Christ, what do you want to be true about your life?

Keep this message somewhere where you can see it frequently, so that in the days, months, and years ahead you can remind yourself of your true goal in life.

One of the best ways to share Christ and minister to people is to allow God to use the things you enjoy doing. Let’s say you love to run. You decide to give your passion for running to God. Each Saturday morning or Sunday afternoon you invite non-Christian

co-workers, friends, neighbors, etc., or fatherless kids or young people in need of mentoring to join you in a run to spend quantity and quality time. Something you enjoy doing to stay in shape and relieve you of stress becomes an open door for God to use you in the lives of people in His name.

Here's another example. You love to cook and also enjoy teaching others to create with food and then share your dishes for others to enjoy. Invite non-Christians and people in need of ministry to your home to learn, help, or just hang out with you while you cook. Then sit down and have dinner together, taking time to talk and fellowship. Or you could invite them to go with you to take your finished goods to neighbors, nursing homes, police stations, etc. with a note including Scripture. The gift of cooking can bless so many and people rarely turn down free food.

God can take almost any hobby, sport, talent, or favorite pastime and turn it into a ministry. From riding Harleys to home decorating, relationships can be built around these activities to lead others to Christ, disciple believers, or simply serve in Jesus' name.

### **Discussion Questions:**

- How does envisioning yourself in God's list of "By faith" people motivate your own faith?
- How might reaching people through a shared interest be a good doorway to introduce someone to Christ?
- Would someone like to share a passion you have that you believe God could use to reach people for Him? Explain.

**Christ + Your Passion = Ministry**

God doesn't need the plumber who trusts Christ to work only on Christians' commodes and sinks. He wants that plumber to take Him to every home and every job to be a witness for Him. God doesn't want a lawyer who comes to know Him to take on only the cases of Christians. He wants that attorney to take Him into every courtroom and case to make a difference in people's lives.

Do you see it? While its great to invite people to church on Sunday, the church the world most wants to see is the one we carry out to the world on Monday! Jesus most certainly went to the Temple but He spent countless more hours amongst the people, going where the hurting and needy were gathered. He was so good at this that eventually the people started gathering around Him, wherever He was! God wants the church to tear down the walls between the community and us, and take Him to them, taking His message of the church to the people.

*Jesus replied, "You are blessed, Simon son of John, because my Father in heaven has revealed this to you. You did not learn this from any human being. Now I say to you that you are Peter (which means 'rock'), and upon this rock I will build my church, and all the powers of hell will not conquer it. (Matthew 16:17-18 NLT)*

Peter's journey in Scripture took him from being a fussy fisherman to an effective evangelist. Jesus went from being Peter's *sacred secret* in the courtyard at His trial to, in only a matter of days, giving his *mass message* to thousands. This is an amazing and challenging truth we must grab hold of today. Jesus wants to build His church on us, right now, and apply our faith to defeat "the powers of hell" in this generation.

Let's look at one final testimony that was written out in a very unique way by Dr. James Allan Francis in 1926.

"He was born in an obscure village, the child of a peasant woman. He grew up in still another village, where He worked in a carpenter shop until He was 30. Then for three years He was an itinerant preacher. He never wrote a book. He never held an office. He

never had a family or owned a house. He didn't go to college. He never traveled more than 200 miles from the place He was born. He did none of the things one usually associates with greatness. He had no credentials. He was only 33 when public opinion turned against Him. His friends deserted Him. He was turned over to His enemies and went through the mockery of a trial. He was nailed to a cross between two thieves. When He was dying, His executioners gambled for His clothing, the only property He had on earth. When He was dead, He was laid in a borrowed grave through the pity of a friend. Nineteen centuries have come and gone and today He is the central figure of the human race, the leader of mankind's progress. All the armies that ever marched, all the navies that ever sailed, all the parliaments that ever sat, all the kings that ever reigned, put together, have not affected the life of man on earth as much as that One Solitary Life. Do You Know Who He Is?"

Take a look at Revelation 5:1-12.

*Then I saw in the right hand of him who sat on the throne a scroll with writing on both sides and sealed with seven seals. And I saw a mighty angel proclaiming in a loud voice, "Who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" But no one in heaven or on earth or under the earth could open the scroll or even look inside it. I wept and wept because no one was found who was worthy to open the scroll or look inside. Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." Then I saw a Lamb, looking as if it had been slain, standing in the center of the throne, encircled by the four living creatures and the elders. ... He came and took the scroll from the right hand of him who sat on the throne. And when he had taken it, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb. Each one had a harp and they were holding golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. And they sang a new song: "You are worthy to take the scroll and to open its seals, because you were slain, and with your blood you purchased men for God from every tribe and language and people and nation. You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth." Then I looked and heard the voice of*

*many angels, numbering thousands upon thousands, and ten thousand times ten thousand. They encircled the throne and the living creatures and the elders. In a loud voice they sang: "Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!" Then I heard every creature in heaven and on earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all that is in them, singing: "To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power, for ever and ever!" (NIV)*

This passage of Scripture paints such a powerful picture of the reality that Jesus was the only One who could rescue mankind. Living for Him is what this life is all about and He chooses to include you in His amazing and eternal story.

So tell your story because it is His-story!

*"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost." (Luke 19:10 NKJV)*

### **Discussion Questions:**

- Why do you think we place such a strong dividing line in our culture between the secular and the sacred when we do not see that divide in the life of Christ?
- Why would people in our culture today want to see the "church on Monday" more than the "church on Sunday"?
- Discuss the contrasts between the "One Solitary Life" story of Jesus to the power and majesty of the Revelation 5 passage.

### **Study Wrap-up**

To conclude this study, we want you to know that throughout the planning and

production of *Steve McQueen: American Icon*, prayers were being lifted up by everyone involved as well as by the body of Christ at Harvest Christian Fellowship. So while we could not yet have known your name, you were prayed for. But God has always known your name and He knew you would come to know Him because He loves you so very much. We close with this prayer for you in your life and faith, echoing Paul's words to the church at Colossi.

*So we have not stopped praying for you since we first heard about you. We ask God to give you complete knowledge of his will and to give you spiritual wisdom and understanding. Then the way you live will always honor and please the Lord, and your lives will produce every kind of good fruit. All the while, you will grow as you learn to know God better and better. We also pray that you will be strengthened with all his glorious power so you will have all the endurance and patience you need. May you be filled with joy, always thanking the Father. He has enabled you to share in the inheritance that belongs to his people, who live in the light. (Colossians 1:9-12 NLT)*

## Appendix

### What About Baptism?

Jesus' baptism was a significant event in His life that marked the beginning of His ministry and displayed His obedience to His Heavenly Father. This was not a private event but a public example of His commitment to God's plan for His life. Your baptism would be for these same reasons as you follow Christ's example.

Baptism is not salvation or a requirement for salvation but simply a demonstration of your new faith in Christ. Going down into the water symbolizes the choice to willfully die to self, as in a burial, and then be raised up from death (the water) to new life in Christ.

Jesus' baptism was also a foreshadowing of what He would actually do in His crucifixion and resurrection to save us. Our baptism reflects the fact that we have received His death as a replacement for our own and His resurrection as what we will one day experience with Him when He brings us home.

*Then Jesus went from Galilee to the Jordan River to be baptized by John. But John tried to talk him out of it. "I am the one who needs to be baptized by you," he said, "so why are you coming to me?" But Jesus said, "It should be done, for we must carry out all that God requires." So John agreed to baptize him. After his baptism, as Jesus came up out of the water, the heavens were opened and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and settling on him. And a voice from heaven said, "This is my dearly loved Son, who brings me great joy." (Matthew 3:13-17 NLT)*

Following Jesus' resurrection and just before He ascended to Heaven, He mentioned baptism once again.

*Jesus came and told his disciples, “I have been given all authority in heaven and on earth. Therefore, go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. (Matthew 28:18-19 NLT)*

Jesus was clear—go make disciples and baptize them in His name. In Jesus asking John to baptize Him, God’s response to Christ’s baptism, and His final instructions to His followers, we see that baptism is important as a public declaration of the decision to follow Christ. Talk with your pastor, priest, or other trusted Christian leader about baptism to answer any other questions you may have.