

The Miracle Path

The Miracle of Loving God & Your Neighbor

Overview - "Love the Lord your God..."

Jesus asked the question,

"Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?"

His reply was very simply and to the point:

**"YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR
HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND"**
(Matthew 22: 36-37)

The miracle of loving God is intertwined with loving our neighbors. It is difficult to believe someone can love God with all their heart, but never see Him, and not be able to love people who are flesh and blood. (I John 4:20) The plan of God is for us to show our love for Him by obeying His Word. His Word teaches us to love one another. Pretty simple! It sounds simple, but this is one of the most difficult things to do in our Christian life.

Because the task is foreign to our nature, God has given us several tools to help us become people who demonstrate His love to the world. In the early church days, these were believers like us who were just beginning to experience God's plan for reaching the world. Many of the teachings of Jesus while He was on earth did not truly make sense until Jesus was resurrected. We will look at the early church to get some of the tools we need to do the job given to us by Jesus Himself:

"Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age."
(Matthew 28:19-20)

*"So then, those who had received his word were baptized; and that day there were added about three thousand souls. They were continually devoting themselves to the **apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer**. Everyone kept feeling a sense of awe; and many wonders and signs were taking place through the apostles. And all those who had believed were together and had all things in common; and they began selling their property and possessions and were sharing with them all, as anyone might have need. Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, **praising God and having favor with all the people** and the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved." (Acts 2:41-47)*

Lesson 1: The Apostle's Teachings

Lesson 2: Fellowship & Breaking of bread

Lesson 3: Prayer

Lesson 4: Walking in Unity

Lesson 5: Praising God

Lesson 6: Who is My Neighbor?

Lesson One - The Apostle's Teachings

The Apostles were foundational to the church and the development of believers. We have a New Testament in our Bibles today as a result of God speaking through these men to the early church. The study of the Word of God is central to the growth of each of us as individuals, as well as, the growth of the church. This is the first tool given to us to develop in us the character of loving God and loving our neighbor.

I. The Word is Truth

The Bible is given to us by God for us to know truth. Truth does not change. We live in a world where everything is relative. We are told that it is not politically correct to call behaviors sin that God has called sin since the beginning of civilization. Relativism says it's okay if you do something as long as you don't make me do it with you. The Word of God does not only contain truth, but it is the truth that guides our lives.

"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth." (John 17:17)

*All Scripture is **inspired by God** and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness;" (II Timothy 3:16)*

*"Be diligent to present yourself approved to God
As a workman who does not need to be ashamed,
Accurately handling the word of truth." (II Timothy 2:15)*

Living according to God's Word is the beginning step in loving God. The teachings we learn from our study of the truth change us from the inside out. Jesus taught His disciples from the Word of God and used it to challenge their thinking and way of living. He will use His Word to do the same thing in our lives today!

II. The Word is a Guide

Truth is like a compass. It helps us to find our way through the world by setting one unchanging standard. When we experience hurt, disappointment, fear, worry, loss of direction, or pain in life, the Bible shows us how to find our way to God, the source of all healing. We can find purpose and vision for our lives as we let the Lord speak to us through His Word.

"How can a young man keep his way pure? By keeping it according to your word. With all my heart I have sought you; Do not let me wander from your commandments. Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You." (Psalm 119:9-11)

"My soul weeps because of grief; Strengthen me according to your word." (Psalm 119:28)

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Psalm 119:105)

III. The Word is Life

The Word of God is different from every other book or writings in the world. Other sacred writings are considered good moral teachings. The Bible claims that it not only explains how to live life and receive eternal life but is spiritual life to those who obey it.

*"My Son, give attention to my words; Incline your ear to my sayings. Do not let them depart from your sight; Keep them in the midst of your heart. **For they are life** to those who find them and health to all their body." (Proverbs 4:20-22)*

*"You, however, continue in the things you have learned and become convinced of, knowing from whom you have learned them, and that from childhood you have known the **sacred writings** which are able to give you the wisdom that **leads to salvation** through faith which is in Christ Jesus." (II Timothy 3: 14-15)*

Personal Study - Lesson One

I. In a concordance or Bible dictionary, look up the word "inspired" (found in II Timothy 3:16). What does it mean? How does that help you to understand the power of the Word of God in your life?

II. II Timothy 3:16 states four things the Word of God is "profitable for." What are those four things and what do they mean?

Lesson Two- Fellowship & Breaking of Bread

Some Christians have a hard time understanding that fellowship is important to spiritual growth. The belief has been spread that Bible study, prayer and preaching are spiritual activities but fellowship is a social activity with no spiritual value. These churches that propose this philosophy seem to be cold and distant. This is not what God intended when he gave us the pattern for the church. We will examine several scriptures that will help us to understand how fellowship works to develop our love for God and for one another.

1. Fellowship develops unity among believers

The term "fellowship" in the New Testament is translated from the Greek word "koinonia." (The language of the original New Testament was Greek.) This word means "fellowship based in a common relationship, interest or concern." As Christians, we all have the common relationship of Jesus Christ as our Savior and Lord. We are changed from people who were in the world doing the things of the world to people who walk in the light. Our interests and concerns are different from people who are not Christians. We have a "commonness" that draws us together.

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live in unity!

It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down upon the collar of his robes.

It is as if the dew of Hermon were falling on Mount Zion.

For there the LORD bestows his blessing, even life forevermore."

(Psalm 133:1-3)

*"I do not ask on behalf of these alone, but for those also who believe in Me through their word; **that they may all be one**; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, **that they may be one, just as We are one;**" (John 17:20-22)*

2. Fellowship causes us to grow in areas we are lacking.

All of us need to grow in certain areas. God uses His Word to reflect the image we are portraying to the world back to us. He also uses people in our life to bring out things in our character and to develop us into mature believers. Sometimes people help us by rubbing us the wrong way! I would not know. I had a problem with anger if someone didn't help me to see myself in the mirror. God uses our relationships to mold and shape us. Hanging around the right people make us more fruitful in God's kingdom.

*"Iron sharpens iron, So one man sharpens another."
(Proverbs 27:17)*

*"If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, **we have fellowship with one another**, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us." (I John 1:6-8)*

*"We urge you, brethren, admonish the unruly, encourage the fainthearted, help the weak, be patient with everyone. See that no one repays another with evil for evil, **but always seek after that which is good for one another and for all people.**" (I Thessalonians 5:14-15)*

*"Do not be bound together with unbelievers; for what partnership have righteousness and lawlessness, or what **fellowship has light with darkness?**" (II Corinthians 6:14)*

3. Fellowship helps us when we go through the trials of life.

Can you imagine how hard it is to go through difficult experiences, such as the loss of a loved one, without a support network? Many people experience this every day. The church is different because we have a common concern for each other. Life will bring challenges to all of us. Our fellowship with others helps us to express our love for them and for Christ as we help them through the situation. No man is an island unto himself. This is one of the strongest effects of our fellowship. It actually attracts unbelievers to us because love attracts.

*"We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives **for the brethren**. But whoever **has the world's goods**, and sees **his brother in need** and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him? Little children, let us not love with word or with tongue, but in deed and truth."* (I John 3:16-18)

*Above all, **keep fervent in our love for one another**, because love covers a multitude of sins. Be hospitable to one another without complaint. As each one has received a special gift, **employ it in serving one another** as good stewards of the manifold grace of God." (II Peter 4:8-10)*

Personal Study - Lesson 2

1. Study Acts 1-3. Write down every instance where the early church got together in fellowship. What was the spiritual significance of each time?

2. Share one experience of "iron sharpens iron" in your life.

Lesson Three - Prayer

Prayer is a vital part of the Christian walk. It is the pipeline to all of God's blessings and provisions. It has been simplified and trivialized much in the past few years. We at Miracle Place Church believe prayer is necessary for spiritual growth.

I. Prayer is Worship

Worship is ascribing worth to something. Our activity of worship does not add worth to God but it is a recognition of His worth. That God is worthy to be praised and adored is a message from both the Old and New Testaments. Worship is one ingredient to a healthy, growing Christian life.

"Worthy are You, our Lord and our God, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and because of Your will they existed and were created." (Revelation 4:11)

"...saying with a loud voice, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing.'" (Revelation 5:12)

"I call upon the LORD, who is -worthy to be praised, and I am saved from my enemies." (11 Samuel 22:4)

"You shall fear only the LORD your God; and you shall worship Him and swear by His name." (Deuteronomy 6:13)

Prayer is a form of worship. In Matthew 6, Jesus laid out the format for prayer.

"When you pray, you are not to be like the hypocrites; for they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on the street corners so that they may be seen by men. Truly I say to you, they have their reward in full. But you, when you pray, go into your inner room, close your door, and pray to your Father who is in secret, and your Father who sees what is done in secret will reward you. And when you are praying, do not use meaningless repetition as the Gentiles do, for they suppose that they will be heard for their many words. So do not be like them; for your Father knows what you need before you ask Him." (Matthew 6:5-8)

These verses teach us several things about prayer:

- Prayer is personal - it should not be done for show or attention
- Prayer is purposeful - it should not be just meaningless talk
- Prayer is powerful - God "sees what is done in secret"

Time alone with God is precious and should be seen as a privilege. The God of the universe has given us the opportunity to speak with Him and promises to meet us there. When we enter the presence of God, it should cause us to worship Him. This is the most intimate part of prayer - spending time with "Daddy." Jesus himself taught His disciples to begin prayer with worship:

"Pray, then, in this way: ' Our Father who is in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come, Your will be done, On earth as it is in heaven.'" (Matthew 6:9-10)

II. Prayer is Warfare

Warfare means "engagement in, or the state of war." We are all involved in the war between God and Satan, whether we like it or not. This war has been raging for thousands of years but it will soon end when Christ returns to earth as the conquering King of Kings. In the meantime, God has given us weapons to fight the forces of darkness.

"Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of His might. Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places. Therefore, take up the full armor of God, so that you will be able to resist in the evil day, and having done everything, to stand firm. Stand firm therefore, HAVING GIRDED YOUR LOINS WITH TRUTH, and HAVING PUT ON THE BREASTPLATE OF RIGHTEOUSNESS, and having shod YOUR FEET WITH THE PREPARATION OF THE GOSPEL OF PEACE; in addition to all, taking up the shield of faith with which you will be able to extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. And take THE HELMET OF SALVATION, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. With all prayer and petition pray at all times in the Spirit, and with this in view, be on the alert with all perseverance and petition for all the saints." (Ephesians 6:10-18)

Prayer is part of the armor of God that is given to us to fight spiritual wars. We are not fighting against an enemy we can see, but an invisible army of spiritual darkness. Jesus said that we fight these spirits - not the people the devil is using. He even told Peter, "Get behind me, Satan." He was not saying that Peter was Satan but that Satan was using Peter. Sometimes opposition is a direct result of the conflict between God's kingdom of light and the darkness in the world.

III. Prayer is Work

Prayer is one of the most demanding spiritual disciplines that we must acquire and learn. It is easy to pray before a meal or a meeting. It is easy to read and study the Bible. It is easier to talk to men about God than it is to talk to God about men, but in order for our words to be effective and powerful we must pray.

These are some of the things required for our prayers to be effective:

A. Prayer requires us to walk in forgiveness.

Matthew 6:14, Mark 11:25-26

If we do not forgive others, God does not forgive us. We must not allow a bitter spirit to hinder our prayers. Forgiving another person does not justify their actions; it simply releases them from a debt they owe you. It frees them but also frees you from a hard heart.

B. Prayer requires us to walk in faith.

Mark 11:22-24, James 1:5-8

Faith is a noun-belief is the action of faith. God responds to our faith, not our needs or desires. Faith is not shown in our words, but in the act of believing God's promises. When we pray, we should focus not on our problem but God's promises and provision for that problem. We must consistently, persistently ask God to meet our needs according to His promises.

C. Prayer requires us to walk in purity.

Psalms 66:18

God cannot hear us when we pray if we are participating in or practicing sin. If I know that a particular behavior is wrong and I continue to allow that to be in my life, then God has said He will not listen. We must not allow any sin to have hold of us in thought, attitude, or deed. Sin breaks the connection between us and God.

D. Prayer requires us to walk in humility.

Luke 18:10-14

We do not like to humble ourselves but the very essence of prayer means I am depending on God rather than my own efforts or abilities. Humility is the ability to place our trust in something or someone greater than ourselves. When I think that I can handle my own problems and difficulties, I will find it very easy to overlook praying. God resists pride, so we must learn to walk in humility.

E. Prayer requires us to walk in obedience.

John 15:7-10

Obedience is the key to all spiritual blessing. If we live in disobedience to God's Word we are living in sin. But even more than that, God says the key to abiding or "finally settling down and feeling at home" is obedience to His commands. When we live this way, God's ear and His heart are open to our requests the same way we are when our own children obey us.

F. Prayer requires us to seek after God.

Matthew 7:7-12

God desires us to know Him in a very intimate, personal relationship. He does not make it impossible to know Him but it does require us to focus our full attention on Him. Seeking after God is not seeking after His blessings or what He can do for us. We seek God's face, not His hand. When we have His face looking upon us, then we have everything in His hand for us.

Prayer is a very important part of a believer's life. Without prayer, we are only doing the things we can accomplish in our own wisdom and strength. It requires us to come to God on His own terms. Prayer is very personal worship. It is very powerful warfare. It is very pressing work. It is the key to our spiritual life and growth because it brings us into a living relationship with our living God.

Lesson 4 - Walking in Unity

We have discussed how prayer is a powerful weapon and a part of our personal worship. A key ingredient to success in every part of our Christian life is learning to walk in unity. The devil's plan brings division and strife. He wants to destroy everything God loves. God has chosen to work through us as individuals to bring together into a mighty, united force for righteousness. Walking in unity with one another brings peace, productivity and power. There is nothing the devil can do to stop the progress of a people who choose to live and walk in unity.

I. Unity is a Key to the Anointing of the Holy Spirit

"Behold, how good and pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, coming down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard, coming down upon the edge of his robes." (Psalm 133:1-2)

This Psalm teaches us how important that unity is for the move of God. The oil spoken of is the anointing oil used to set apart men for ministry in the Old Testament. It is symbolic of the presence and power of the Holy Spirit on the person's life to do the work of the Lord. It is a simple comparison between the unity of brothers and the anointing. God chooses to move where people have chosen to walk in unity.

This is backed up in the New Testament:

*"When the day of Pentecost had come, **they were all together in one place.** And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And **they were all filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance." (Acts 2:1-4)*

"Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart, praising God and having favor with all the people and the Lord was adding to their number day by day those who were being saved." (Acts 2:46-47)

*"And when they heard this, **they lifted their voices to God with one accord** and said, "O Lord, it is You who MADE THE HEAVEN AND THE EARTH AND THE SEA, AND ALL THAT IS IN THEM, who by the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David Your servant, said, WHY DID THE GENTILES RAGE, AND THE PEOPLES DEVISE FUTILE THINGS? THE KINGS OF THE EARTH TOOK THEIR STAND, AND THE RULERS WERE GATHERED TOGETHER AGAINST THE LORD AND AGAINST CHRIST. For truly in this city they were gathered together against Your holy servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose predestined to occur. And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Your bond-servants may speak Your Word with all confidence, while You extend Your hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Your holy servant Jesus. **And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered together was shaken, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit** and began to speak the Word of God with boldness." (Acts 4:24-31)*

In each of these scriptural instances, unity of the believers preceded the mighty move of God. Unity was not based upon doctrine or issues; it was based on their common relationship with Jesus Christ as the Messiah. When we become united in our hearts around the fact that Jesus died on the cross to deliver us from sin, God will show up in mighty power and anointing.

II. Unity in the Church is Developed by Each Believer's Participation

Each believer has a responsibility to help build unity. The devil is the author of confusion, strife, lies and division.

Where there is "**di-vision**" there is "**die-vision.**"

There can only be one vision in the church. God has chosen to give the vision to the Pastor. If you have vision that seeks to go in a different direction from that given to the Pastor, you may be allowing the wrong spirit to use you for his gain.

We must do our part to allow the Holy Spirit to flow. We must be able to recognize the attacks of the enemy meant to destroy unity.

Some of these attacks are:

A. Strife resulting from immaturity.

"And I brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able to receive it. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?" (I Corinthians 3:1-3)

These Christians were immature. They were fussing and fighting over who was the best spiritual leader. Some were of Peter; others were of Paul; and others were of Christ. This brought the wrong spirit into the church. There were all kinds of problems that resulted from their immaturity.

B. Strife that results from doctrinal disputes and differences.

*"If anyone advocates a different doctrine and does not agree with sound words, those of our Lord Jesus Christ, and with the doctrine conforming to godliness, he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, **out of which arise envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions, and constant friction** between men of depraved minds and deprived of the truth, who suppose that godliness is a means of gain."*
(I Timothy 6:3-5)

"But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and strife and Disputes about the Law, for they are unprofitable and worthless." (Titus 3:9)

Some people try to use doctrine as a way to separate the body rather than instruct the body. They mean well enough, but they have the wrong spirit. There have been arguments about doctrines and teachings going on for over two thousand years that will not be solved until we get to heaven. **I am not saying we should sacrifice doctrinal integrity for the sake of unification, but we should be able to agree on the basics.** In the body, the Pastors set the tone of the doctrinal teachings of the church. Arguing and striving over words is a tactic the devil uses every day to bring division to the body of Christ.

C. Strife resulting from fleshly desires.

"For you were called to freedom, brethren; only do not turn your freedom into an opportunity for the flesh, but through love, serve one another.

*For the whole Law is fulfilled in one word, in the statement
"YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF."*

***But if you bite and devour one another, take care that you are not consumed by one another. But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desires of the flesh."** (Galatians 5:13-16)*

Strife and confusion are produced by allowing ourselves to be controlled by fleshly desires. When we serve one another in love, we put those desires to death. These are some of the enemies to unity in the body of Christ.

We must all do our part to keep unity in the Body of Christ. It is a work that requires focus and determination.

*"with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love, **being diligent to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling.**" (Ephesians 4:2-4)*

III. Unity will Build God's Kingdom, not Man's Kingdom

We are told in the scriptures to "*seek God's kingdom and His righteousness.*" God's kingdom is more than one church, more than one denomination or even one period of time. God's kingdom is spiritual- not bound by time or space. God's kingdom transcends the plans of any one man or group of people.

Modern Christianity has been plagued by leaders who have made their own personal agenda the agenda for the church. Political issues are not the agenda of God. Jesus spent almost no time talking about the political injustices of the Roman government that ruled when he was alive. Social issues are not to become the agenda of the church, although we must stand for righteousness in society. The issue of slavery in America was so divisive that it caused a war and yet the New Testament writers addressed it as a common practice in their day. We must not become confused about the difference between our earthly plans and God's kingdom. God's kingdom is bigger than all of us.

Jesus prayed in the garden just before he was taken away to be crucified. This was one of the most important prayers He prayed because He was about to leave this earth. It is called the "High Priestly Prayer." Jesus prayed that His disciples would walk in unity and love after He was gone. He also included all of us in that prayer.

Jesus said that unity among His disciple would be a witness to the world that He was sent here by God to be the Savior of the world. Wow! That is powerful! The whole world "hears" the gospel when we walk in unity and love!

*"Sanctify them in the truth; Your word is truth. As You sent Me into the world, I also have sent them into the world. For their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they themselves also may be sanctified in truth. I do not ask on behalf of these alone, **but for those also who believe in Me through their word; that they may all be one**; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they also may be in Us, **so that the world may believe that You sent Me.** The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one." (John 17:17-22)*

Personal Study - Lesson Four

1. In the above scripture, what did Jesus mean when He said, "those who believe in Me through their word?" Who is included in this statement?

2. Read Ephesians 4:2-4. How can I help to preserve the unity of the Spirit according to these verses?

3. List three reasons why unity is important to the work of the gospel.

Lesson Five - Praising God

Praise is a powerful tool in the development of a believer. Praise is more than singing, dancing or shouting, although it may incorporate all of these things. The importance of praise in our life is summed up in the statement -

"O my God, I cry in the day time, but thou hears not; and in the night season and am not silent. But thou art holy, O thou that inhabits the praises of Israel. Our fathers trusted in thee: they trusted, and you did deliver them." (Psalm 22:2-4)

God inhabits or "dwells" in the praises of His people. That means all of God's power and glory are manifested when we start to praise Him. Praise is a powerful thing.

I. The Definitions of Praise

The Biblical definition of praise is "to laud or applaud" something or someone. There are actually several different words translated into English from the Old Testament language of Hebrew. This is a simple list of them:

1. Barak – to kneel in adoration. Psalm 72:15
2. Halal – to boast or rave; to celebrate. Psalm 150
3. Zamar – to play upon the strings. Psalm 108:1
4. Yadah – to lift hands extended out in adoration. Psalm 9:1
5. Shabach – to shout aloud. Psalm 63:3
6. Towdah – to lift hands in supplication. Psalm 42:4

As you can see, the English word "praise" is used to interpret these six major words of the Old Testament. This word is derived from the French word "preiter" which means "to prize." The idea is not "giving value" to something, but praise "recognizes value." When we give praise to God we are recognizing His value or worth. Praise can be an active word (a verb). This means it is something we can do. We can praise God. It may also be used as a noun. When we sing His "praises" we are telling of His greatness and goodness. When we understand these meanings, we have a better understanding of what it is to "praise the Lord!" (**hallel u Yah**)

II. The Description of Praise

A picture says more than a thousand words. Sometimes definitions are better understood when there are descriptions to help. We will look at a picture of each of the words above to help get a better understanding of the meaning.

1. barak - to kneel in adoration

In Judges 5, Deborah sang a song of praise for the deliverance of the people of God from the enemy. She said "praise" or "kneel before" the Lord who has avenged us from our enemies. This was a position of humility because she recognized that deliverance did not come from man, but it was a supernatural event done by the hand of God. God is to be praised because He alone delivers us.

2. halal - to boast or rave; to celebrate

In Jeremiah 20, the prophet Jeremiah was in a terrible spot. After he spoke the Word of the Lord against the priest and leaders of Jerusalem, the governor had him beaten and put into stocks. The chapter expresses the heart of this man of God. At first, there was pity and remorse because he obeyed God but then ended up in the stocks. Then he recognized the greatness of God who was able to deliver and cause his enemies to stumble. He said "praise" or "celebrate" the Lord! It is amazing how our focus can change our situation. When we focus on the problem, it gets worse. When we focus on God and praise Him, problems disappear!

3. zamar - to play upon the strings

David was a young man who spent time watching his father's herds of sheep. He spent many hours playing his harp and worshiping the Lord as he watched the sheep. He was later a servant to King Saul in the palace. When Saul was troubled by an evil spirit, David played songs he wrote while watching the sheep. The power of praise would drive the evil spirits far from King Saul. God uses praise on the instruments as a powerful weapon against the enemy.

4. yadah - to lift hands extended out in adoration

This was a common expression of praise and adoration. Hands extended out demonstrated that nothing was needed or even being requested. It was a symbol of surrender - "under arrest." It says to God, "I am not asking anything from you, I just want to give my praise to You." This is a "sacrifice of praise, even the fruit of our lips giving thanks unto our God."

5. shabach - to shout aloud

The shout is a great expression of victory. In II Chronicles 20:20-25, King Jehoshaphat sent those who praised the Lord in song out in front of his armies against the armies of Moab, Ammon and Mount Seir. The Lord threw those armies into confusion and they began to kill one another. This may not sound like a very good military strategy but God used the praises of His people to bring about a rout of the enemy. Sometimes the shout is a fruit of joy- results of God's goodness. Sometimes the shout is the seed of joy - requesting God's help. When I go to the store for milk, it is because *I don't have any milk!* **Shout for joy as a means of obtaining the joy!!!**

6. towdah - to lift hands in supplication

The expression of praise that comes from desperation and desire is hands lifted like cups. Over and over, the Psalmists said "I wait for your goodness..." When I am in need, pain, or disappointment, I can lift up my hands to the Lord with the expectancy that He will fill my cup. *My soul waits for You, Oh Lord.*

III. The Demonstration of Praise

*"And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: Who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison and made their feet fast in the stocks. **And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.** And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: **and immediately all the doors were opened,** and everyone's bands were loosed. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself supposing that the prisoners had been fled. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling and fell down before Paul and Silas, and brought them out, and said, **Sirs, what must I do to be saved? And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house. And they spake unto him the Word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.** And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house". (Acts 16:23-34)*

This story demonstrates the power of praise in the life of a believer. Paul and Silas were in prison for preaching the gospel. They were beaten and locked up. In the darkest night, instead of moaning and groaning, they were singing and praising God. They made the choice to rejoice. As a result, the jailer was born again! They also were set free from their circumstances and allowed to leave the prison. Paul and Silas shared the good news with the jailer's family and all of them were saved! As a result of this opportunity, God used these mighty men to plant a church in Philippi. Praise has the power to deliver and set men free.

Personal Study - Lesson 5

1. Read Psalm 100. What is the importance of praise and thanksgiving described in these verses?

2. Read Psalm 147-150. What do these Psalms teach us about praise?

Lesson Six - Who is My Neighbor?

"And a lawyer stood up and put Him to the test, saying, 'Teacher, what shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? How does it read to you?' And he answered, 'YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART, AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL, AND WITH ALL YOUR STRENGTH, AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND; AND YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.' And He said to him, 'You have answered correctly; DO THIS AND YOU WILL LIVE.' But wishing to justify himself, he said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbor?'" (Luke 10:25-29)

This is the dialogue that precedes what is commonly called the story of the Prodigal Son. The question presented by the religious teacher still has impact on the church today. As we have been studying about loving God, we must remember that the only true test of our love for God is, do we love people?

*"We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren. But whoever has the world's goods, and sees his brother in need and closes his hear against him, **how does the love of God abide in him?"** (I John 3:16-17)*

Our response to the love of God is evidenced by our love of our brothers in Christ. This love is defined by the Greek word "agape."

All of these things can be seen in how God loves us. He requires that we love others:

*"Beloved, if God so loved us, **we also ought to love one another.**"*
(I John 4:11)

I. Love that is Unconditional

Love that has conditions on it is not really love at all. When God loves us as sinners, He does not require us to clean up our lives **before** coming to Him. He allows us to come as we are - sinners. Many times we treat people differently than God treats us. The religious people in the story of the Good

Samaritan all avoided the man who had been robbed and beaten. They went out of their way to "stay pure." We have to be careful not to allow our own self-righteousness to get in the way of ministering to others who may not be like us. Prejudice is defined as: "1. A preconceived opinion that is based on reason or experience. 2. Unjust behavior formed on such a basis."

Some of the groups that are shown prejudice in the church are:

1. Other ethnic groups than the predominant majority group.
(Racial Prejudice)
2. Other social groups that differ from the majority.
(Class Prejudice)
3. Other economic-based groups that are different, for better or worse.
(Socio-economic Prejudice)

God did not make one class of people, ethnic or economic group better than others. He requires us to love others in the same way and to the same extent as He loves us. We must deal with our pre-judging of others if we are going to be able to love our neighbor. Sometimes the sin may be disgusting, the smell distasteful, and the sight despicable, but we must not be controlled by our senses. Loving unconditionally means loving without any requirements for change.

II. Love that is Divine in its Source

Unconditional love is only possible when we realize that it does not come from the heart of man, but from the heart of God. Man is not the source of this love but is a channel of God's love. It is not really possible for us to demonstrate this type of love without tapping into God's unlimited resources. Anyone can be patient and kind for a short time, real love is committed for the long term.

*"And if I give all my possessions to feed the poor, and if I surrender my body to be burned, **but do not have love**, it profits me nothing. Love is patient, love is kind and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things." (I Corinthians 13:3-6)*

This passage is part of the famous "Love Chapter." It says that it is possible to feed the poor and give my body to be burned but not have love. That is hard to comprehend. The source of the love that changes a person is not found in our human goodness but in the divine love that comes from God. We must allow God to love others through us because sometimes we are not even aware of the true nature of the need in a person's life. God knows and cares. If we yield ourselves to Him, He will use us as conduits of His love, mercy, forgiveness, and grace. If we walk in the spirit, we will find ourselves responding and acting in way we never dreamed possible. This love is divine in its source and in its power.

III. Love that is Active

All of the scriptures we are studying talk about love in a very active way. The Samaritan man **did** something. He took the man to a place of care, cleaned him up, bandaged his wounds and provided for his needs. What an awesome description of a church doing the work of God!! When we really are loving people as God loves them, we will not feel inconvenienced by their needs. We will feel compelled to help them. Sometimes this act of love will cost us our time, our money, and even possibly our standing in the eyes of men. Remember, we are not loving because we are looking for acceptance or approval from men. It is our responsibility and should be the natural outflow of gratitude because God has loved us with an everlasting love, if we close our heart to those in need, God asks us "**...how does the love of God abide in him?**"

Personal Study - Lesson 6

1. The Bible states that "faith works by love." (Galatians 5:6) How does faith and love as we have studied it work together? Look up other scriptures that relate faith and love for our neighbor.
2. Describe some of the attitudes of prejudice that you grew up around and what the Word of God teaches about dealing with those issues.
3. What does it mean in I Corinthians 13 when it says "love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things...?"

The Miracle Path

Join us on a wonderful course to spiritual discovery on the ***Miracle Path***. Every Christian is a participant in the process of growing to become more like Christ. Many people are moving along through life hoping they will be successful in their Christian walk; the ***Miracle Path*** is a tool to help every believer rise to their full potential in Christ. It is a miracle when God takes an everyday, common person and transforms them into a mighty, committed, powerful warrior for Christ. This is the ultimate goal of the ***Miracle Path***.

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Topics Covered-

- ❖ *Putting Off the Grave Clothes*
- ❖ *Becoming a Friend of God*
- ❖ *Into What Then Were You Baptized?*
- ❖ *Passing On the Blessing*
- ❖ *The Resurrection from the Dead*
- ❖ *And After This, the Judgment...*

Series Two: *The Miracle of Loving God and Loving Your Neighbor*

Topics Covered-

- ❖ *The Apostle's Teachings*
- ❖ *Fellowship and the Breaking of Bread*
- ❖ *Prayer*
- ❖ *Walking in Unity*
- ❖ *Praising God*
- ❖ *Who is My Neighbor?*

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Topics Covered-

- ❖ *Spiritual Gifts in the Body of Christ*
- ❖ *What is My Gift?*
- ❖ *How can I Develop My Gift?*
- ❖ *How can I Use My Gift?*