DAY ONE

“You say you attend church occasionally. Is that because your pastor only preaches occasionally?”

-MISS CLARA WAR ROOM

This week is about spiritual evaluation. The word *evaluation* in 2 Corinthians 13:5 is taken from the Greek word *dokimazo*. It means, to test or to prove, to determine “whether a thing is genuine.”

There is a big difference between claiming to be a Christian and actually knowing Christ and living as a maturing believer. Anyone can claim to know him, but those that do will experience a genuine heart transformation from the inside out (See 2 Cor. 5:17). The book of 1 John shows us that truly knowing Christ will result in a lifestyle of obedience, repentance of sin, a living faith, evidence of God’s Spirit, and a love for other Christians. One such characteristic of early Christians was their willing connection to a body of believers. They wanted to share their lives with other Christians.

READ ACTS 2:44-46.
Describe the nature of the early believer’s connection to one another in this passage.

Which of these experiences of the early church is most evident in the believers you know? Which do you think is most lacking? Why?

Now read 1 Corinthians 12:24b-27 below. Underline each use of the word member.

GOD HAS PUT THE BODY TOGETHER, GIVING GREATER HONOR TO THE LESS HONORABLE, SO THAT THERE WOULD BE NO DIVISION IN THE BODY, BUT THAT THE MEMBERS WOULD HAVE THE SAME CONCERN FOR EACH OTHER. SO IF ONE MEMBER SUFFERS, ALL THE MEMBERS SUFFER WITH IT; IF ONE MEMBER IS HONORED, ALL THE MEMBERS REJOICE WITH IT. NOW YOU ARE THE BODY OF CHRIST.
Describe a time of distress when you have experienced sympathy and concern from your local body of believers. You may also choose a time when you have been able to offer that same concern for someone else connected to you in the body of Christ.

Now reflect on a moment when you shared personal joy or celebration with your local body of Christ. How did your church family multiply your joy?

CLOSE TODAY’S STUDY BY READING HEBREWS 10:23-25.

For what reason(s) does the writer encourage believers to maintain faithful gatherings?

Though God is perfect, His followers on earth are not. All churches are made up of people like you and me who daily need God’s grace and forgiveness. Though we each can stumble (see Jas. 3:21), God still commands all His children to stay connected—to love, serve, forgive, encourage, comfort, and pray for one another on a consistent basis. We all mutually benefit and God is glorified. It’s beautiful!

Before moving on to the second session of individual study for this week, take a moment to prayerfully evaluate your connection to the local church.

If your commitment to the local church is an indication of your faith in Christ, what does it say about you?

Outside of action movies, smart soldiers don’t go into battle alone. You need the local body of Christ and the local body of Christ needs you.

In closing, prayerfully ask God how He wants you to be more deeply connected to His church.


DAY TWO

“SO IF I ASKED YOU WHAT YOUR PRAYER LIFE WAS LIKE, WOULD YOU SAY THAT IT WAS HOT OR COLD?”

-MISS CLARA WAR ROOM

Start today by answering Miss Clara’s question. In fact, be as specific as possible using the plot line below. What is your prayer life like? Hot, cold, or somewhere in between?

COLD HOT
Perhaps the most common understanding of prayer in the life of a believer is communication with God. We talk and He listens. He speaks and we need. At least that is how it should work, right? Many times that communication is reduced to nothing more than a list of request begged of our benevolent God. How much would your life change if you began to view and treat God like your closest, most intimate friend rather than a casual acquaintance? What if you saw prayer as a constant necessity rather than an occasional afterthought? What if it became a ready weapon rather than a random want ad?

READ Ephesians 6:10-18.

**How much of the armor do we daily need to put on?**

In the space provided, list each part of God’s armor and the purpose it welds in the life of the believer.

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**Look back at Ephesians 6:11. Why is the armor so important for the believer?**

The word tactics in the HCSB is translated as schemes in the NASB. In Greek, that word is methodela, which means “cunning arts, deceit, crafts, and trickery.” It is found only twice in the New Testament, both in Paul’s letter to believers in Ephesus. The first occurrence in Ephesians 4:14 reference the trickery of men. But in Ephesians 6:11, it describes the scheming lies of the Devil. Paul’s recommended defense? The armor of God. One does not commonly equate prayer with battle attire, but it is no accident that Paul commands believers to pray when engaging in spiritual warfare.

Name three things we are told to do as we put on the armor of God (vs. 13:18)

According to verse 18:
When should we pray?
Whom should we pray for?
How should we pray?

Write what each phrase in verse 18 means to you:
At all times:
Every prayer and request:
Stay alert:
All perseverance:
Intercession for all the saints:
How much we pray reveals how much we depend on God. Praying is the antithesis of the self-sufficiency modeled by the Laodicean believers. Approaching God through Jesus in prayer at any time for anything is always a priceless privilege. We all need God all the time. We need His grace moment by moment to help us not waste opportunities, not become self-centered, and not fall into sin. A richer, more active prayer life results when we humbly admit our need for Him and then daily depend on God for the wisdom and grace to do His will in each situation.

**What causes you to forget your need for Christ and the armor of God?**

Prayer is one of our best resources when it comes to spiritual growth. It’s a weapon we have for battle. It’s also the best position to be in when making evaluations. As you close today, choose a posture or submission. On your knees or lying face down, confess your great need for God. Ask Him to identify for you things you try to place before Him. Express your desire to remove those things and depend solely on Him.

**Before moving on, compose a statement indicating your desire for a richer prayer life.** Express to God where you would like your prayer life to go in the days ahead. Ask Him to help you get there.

**DAY THREE**

**“YOU DON’T HAVE TO STEP ON THE SAME LAND MINES THAT I DID. THAT’S A WASTE OF TIME.”** -MISS CLARA WAR ROOM

In your first individual study this week, the importance of connecting deeply with a local body of believers was examined in Scripture. One of the greatest benefits to such a connection is the depth of learning that comes from walking through life with other believers. We don’t have to repeat one another’s mistakes. Paul wrote to Corinthian believers, “Imitate me, as I also imitate Christ” (1 Cor. 11:1). Modeling life after other seasoned believers who are slightly further along in the journey is one of the Bible’s prescribed methods of discipleship.

READ HEBREWS 13:7.

**CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS RELATED TO THAT VERSE:**

*Who in your life models Christlikeness for you? What have you learned from this person?*

*What land mines have you avoided because of this person’s wise example or counsel?*
USE THE FOLLOWING QUESTIONS AS AN EVALUATION TOOL AND COMMIT TO TAKE STEPS TO IMPROVE IN THE AREAS WHERE YOU ARE LACKING:

Is your spiritual life apathetic, joyless, and passionless?

Do you have at least one sin you refuse to repent of?

Do you have at least one person you refuse to forgive?

Do you love and seek God less than you once did?

Are the words of your mouth displeasing to God and dishonorable to others?

Do you see no evidence of answered prayer or the power of God at work in your life?

Do you have time for entertainment, but not for Bible study, prayer, or sharing your faith?

Do you let pride, worry, or fear stop you from obeying what God has told you to do?

Does your family see you behave one way at church and another at home?

Is your worship of God half-hearted and mediocre?

CONCLUDE BY READING ALOUD PSALM 145:4 PROVIDED BELOW.
ONE GENERATION WILL DECLARE YOUR WORKS TO THE NEXT AND WILL PROCLAIM YOUR MIGHTY ACTS.

As a maturing believer, you are likely younger than some veteran followers of Jesus and older still than others. It is valuable to think about those whom you follow and also who follows you. How important it is for us to consider the generation coming after us and the things we may pass on of our faith, as well as the faith legacy that has been passed down to us. Reference again Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 11:1. He makes a similar statement in 1 Corinthians 4:16. Twice in this letter, he invites believers in Corinth to follow/imitate/shadow his life. Why? Because of the example of Christ he intended to set.

In the next group session, you will see a humorous clip dealing with friendship and Christian accountability—a key feature of healthy relationships. Accountability is a valuable asset in both sides of the mentoring equation. You need members of Christ’s body whom you are accountable to and also those who are accountable to you. As iron sharpens iron, one friend will sharpen another (See Prov. 27:17).

Pray now for your present or future mentors and also those who will be under your care. List the names of the people in your life to whom you feel a personal responsibility to model a Christ-like example.