

THE REALITY

When I teach a class or seminar, I often ask for a show of hands from all those who believe that they were adequately prepared to handle conflict and the problems of life. It is quite astounding when so few hands are raised. Typically, it is the vast minority (sometimes even *no one*) who believe that they were well *equipped for life and love*.

The reality of life is that everyone fails, everyone sins, everyone is hurt, and everyone experiences difficult trials and tribulations of many kinds. There is little dispute over these facts. However, what we often fail to realize is that only a tiny fraction of our population is somewhat equipped, if at all, to handle these often overwhelming situations of life. What makes matters worse, much worse, is that we are often directed to the world's wisdom in order to train us to handle life and fix our problems. So, for an increasing number of people, instead of merely being *unequipped*, they are *erroneously* equipped.

After years of ministry, counseling, researching, writing, and teaching classes, Bible studies, and seminars, it has become more and more painfully obvious to me that we the church are woefully unprepared when it comes to dealing with the ever present and unavoidable challenges of life.

We all have these tests thrust upon us, yet what exactly determines who fails miserably and who passes with flying colors? Success is achieved only to the extent that one knows and loves God, is equipped through His perfect Word, and faithfully applies His "Word of life" (1 Jn 1:1). What an incredible difference *Biblical* equipping would make in the church, in marriages, in families, in child training, in individual lives, and even in our impact on the world at large!

Sadly, there are seemingly few of us who yearn for this to become a true reality.

How committed are you to transforming your heart? How willing are you to dedicate the next few months to equipping yourself for life, the overcoming life that is pleasing to God?

The material in this book is often intense. Those who take this class and/or read this book often comment on how much there is to study. The successful completion of this book will be arduous and lacking in entertainment value. Therefore, it will require a deeply passionate individual who takes their relationship with God seriously. If you are up to the task, then make a commitment now, between yourself and God, to fully complete every section in this book.

In actively desiring to be more like Christ, to be thoroughly equipped, to know love, and to minister to others, you are pursuing an unsurpassed goal. Throughout God's Word we are all called many times and in many ways to directly and tangibly help, encourage, love, and "carry each other's burdens." Therefore, write the following verses on the tablet of your heart to assist you in achieving your godly ambition:

We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

Romans 15:1-2

We proclaim *him*, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone perfect in Christ. To this end I labor, struggling with all his energy, which so powerfully works in me.

Colossians 1:28-29

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Galatians 6:2

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers.

Galatians 6:10

Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction.

2 Timothy 4:2

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.

1 Peter 3:15

FIRST THINGS FIRST

We must *first* set apart Jesus as the Lord of our heart. We cannot maintain a casual or weak relationship with the Wonderful Counselor and expect to experience effective relationships with others. How well will we be able to love, help, and bless others without God and His Word reigning in our lives? The supremacy of Christ in our life is paramount in *everything* we do—how much more so when it comes to ministering to the hearts of others. Therefore, the primary step in loving, helping, or counseling others is to deal with our own heart *first* before addressing the hearts of our brothers and sisters.

Jesus explained the logic and reality behind this fundamental priority:

Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, "Let me take the speck out of your eye," when all the time there is a plank

in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye.

Matthew 7:3-5

Therefore, much of the material for this course will be directed toward *your* heart and improving your relationship with God and your grasp of His Word. If/when you transform your heart, you will be increasingly equipped to love and assist your brothers and sisters to do the same (Phil 1:9-11; Col 1:9-12).

The opportunity to minister to others is a bountiful treasure waiting to be enjoyed, now and for eternity. However, this blessing, while glorious, is not always pleasant and it is rarely, if ever, easy.

Oswald Chambers described our endeavor this way:

"The calling of a New Testament worker is to uncover sin and to reveal Jesus Christ as Saviour, consequently he cannot be poetical, he must be sternly surgical. We are sent by God to lift up Jesus Christ, not to give wonderfully beautiful discourses. We have to probe straight down as deeply as God has probed us, to be keen in sensing the Scriptures which bring the truth straight home and to apply them fearlessly."

My Utmost For His Highest

This training is designed to not only impact your life (and it will, if you so desire); nor is it limited to those who you are blessed to minister directly to. If it is done right, some of the people you minister to will, over time, *also* love, bless, and minister to others (e.g., "many witnesses," "reliable men"), while they, in turn, will also minister to more people...and so on and so on. In this way, *untold numbers of people have the potential to be influenced by your faithful study and application of God's Word.*

And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who will also be qualified to teach others.

2 Timothy 2:2

WARNING

This training course will be challenging! (Hopefully this is why you are here. Those who have “arrived” spiritually, at least in their own minds, need not apply.) *Anyone* can successfully complete this class, enjoy it, and grow immensely, but at times it may be intense and demanding. This is a good thing! With God, you can do *anything*. “Everything is possible for him who believes” (Mk 9:23). The instruction and material are designed to challenge you so that you can grow and become “thoroughly equipped” for life, love, and to minister to others. However, if you are not up for a spiritual challenge, if you are used to taking the path of least resistance, if you are not willing to die to yourself, then you will not enjoy the fullness of the potential blessings and fruit which God desires for you.

- **Be prepared!**

Commit to being 100 percent brutally honest—with yourself and with God. To the extent that you are not willing to be *absolutely* truthful, you will miss out. You will get what you give. “A man reaps what he sows” (Gal 6:7).

- **Check your desires.**

Confirm for yourself that you are absolutely serious about growing in your relationship with Christ. If you lack passion for God and His Word, along with an excitement for changing your life and relationships, then this training will constantly clash with your desires.

- **Understand that taking this course will not please the enemy.**

Satan is never happy when his schemes and lies are exposed. He will do everything within his dark and deceptive power to deter you and to discredit any truth revealed by God’s Word and His Spirit. Do not be surprised by the resistance and difficulties you will experience while truly applying God’s truth to your heart.

- **Realize that the information contained herein will not please some people.**

Not everyone believes the same things. Not everyone has the same desires and goals. Not everyone has the same view of truth, love, people, God, the Bible, the world’s “wisdom,” and relationships. We should always welcome differences, exhortations, corrections, and even rebuke when it is based on the truth (even if it is not done well or not done in love). Truth is proved Biblically and logically—not by feelings, experiences, man’s wisdom, and (especially) not by whatever is accepted and popular. In fact, the latter often *disprove* a person’s argument (see Matt 7:13-14; Lk 16:15). Godly desire is always passionate for the truth, love, and God’s glory, not to merely be “right,” to “win” an argument, or to *appear* good to others. “Let God be true, and every man a liar” (Rom 3:4). This by no means suggests that we should always agree, or that the majority dictates what is truth. Jesus is Truth. God’s Word is Truth. We are never sanctified (i.e., changed, *set apart from the world*) by the world’s/man’s wisdom, but only by God’s Word (Jn 17:17). Know that if you have immersed yourself in or believe in the world’s wisdom, then your beliefs and thinking will be continuously challenged throughout this course. Many do not like this and will quit early on. If you are a proponent of current popular ideas then your mindset will constantly clash with the Scriptural principles herein.

- **Recognize that this material will not appeal to your flesh.**

If you are looking to feel good (right away), this course may not be for you. Yet, although you may experience conviction and grief, you will also experience an abundance of hope, peace, love, relief, joy, and freedom. Your sinful nature will quickly realize that taking this course, answering many difficult questions, and applying God's Word *is a full-on attack to its very being*. As a result, it will pull every dirty trick in the book to get you to fail in your endeavor to change your heart, grow closer to God, and to truly love and minister to others. Always remember that your flesh hates God, it hates God's Word, **it hates you**, it hates growth, and it hates the truth. Your flesh, while ever pretending to be your friend, will do anything and everything to convince you to *not* complete this training, to fail to read the material, and to refrain from answering the many questions.

If you still desire to take this course, your sinful nature will not make it easy for you to be open and honest. Even if you are transparent and truthful, your sinful nature will do everything it can to keep you from applying what you learn so that you cannot change, grow, minister to others, and glorify God (Lk 6:46-49; Jas 1:22; 2:17). The completion of this material and seminar will not be easy, but it will be worth everything that you put into it. It will require faith, *bold* faith that is **put into action**, all at the expense of your flesh and, at times, your temporary comfort and happiness.

Count the cost. Now is the time to determine your commitment to God's design and desire for you. You will be so glad that you did.