

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Growth
Week 9 – The Means of Growth: Body Life, Part 2 and the Word

Overview

- **Body Life as a means of growth, part 2**
 - **Structures that facilitate body life**
 - **Can a lifestyle of love be fulfilling?**
 - **Common Barriers to body life.**
- **The Word as a means of growth**

Introduction

Last week we looked at biblical principles that healthy body life is based on. Now let's consider how those principles can be lived out in the local church.

Structures that facilitate healthy body life.

Groups of Christians who live out the principles we covered last week (living consistently with our new identity; giving and receiving the love of Christ) and who maintain a burden for reaching the lost will enjoy healthy body life. Structures or programs we adopt in the local church (e.g. home groups, cell groups, etc.) should be designed to support and facilitate the carrying out of these core principles. What structures at Xenos facilitate the body life described in the New Testament?

- *Home groups* are meant to facilitate fellowship. This is the example of the New Testament (Acts 2:42,46,47; Rom. 16). While they do not assure Body-life involvement, they provide a context within which to build these kinds of relationships that go on through the week.
- *Cell/study groups*: This is an even smaller context for getting to know people in your home group, building friendships that carry through the week.
- *Fellowship after Central Teaching*: Evangelism-focused home groups wisely use the time after Central Teachings to fellowship. Deliberate effort is made by the church to provide an environment that makes it easy and fun to stay after the teachings for a while and hang out with one another. It is a great opportunity for guests to see and experience John 13:34,35 in a manner that won't happen if the group just gets up and goes home after the meeting. If we have no guests that week, it is a great opportunity to build depth with other members of the body of Christ.
- *Time outside meetings*: This is where the rubber REALLY meets the road in a Christian's walk—where we see their lifestyle truly being transformed. (e.g. regular one-on-one time with others over breakfasts, lunches, or spending time at someone's house, etc.). This is where discipleship usually occurs. There is time to study the Word together, pray together, discuss personal issues, and get to know one another on a deeper level. Showing up at parties and events is fine, but the sacrificial lifestyle the Bible depicts shows up in how we commit to consistent time in the Lord's work with people.
- *Ministry houses*: Living with Christian roommates provides an excellent context for learning and practicing Body-life.
- *Retreats*: Many people experience Body life for the first time on a weekend retreat when people can spend an extended period of time together.

- *Praying with others in your home group*: Talking openly to God with others binds you closer with others as you draw closer Christ.
- *Vacations with others in your home group*: Experiencing new things together, coupled with additional times for sharing and prayer adds a whole new dimension to vacations.

We don't adopt structures just because "they make me feel good" or because "others do it this way." When structures draw our attention away from the core principles that support healthy body life, they need to be replaced with new ones.

Can a lifestyle of self-giving love be fulfilling?

The world views this lifestyle of giving oneself for the good of others as madness, but God calls us to this.

(Phil. 2:3-5) Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself; 4 do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. 5 Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,

The paradox of self-giving love, or "ministry as a means of growth."

Illustration: "Rain-barrels" [teacher: it tends to be more effective if told as if this was a true story]. I was looking for barrels that would collect rain off my roof so that I could irrigate my garden with the stored, fresh water – cheaply! The garden store showed me a type that had a spigot to attach the hose to at the bottom, but there was no opening for the water from the downspout to pour into! I asked about how the water gets in and he explained, "Just attach your hose and open the spigot. As you water your lawn the barrel will fill." I thought he was crazy! I said, "Not how to get the water out, but IN so that I can then water the lawn." He repeated himself, "Just start emptying it with a hose and it will fill," and added he'd give me my money back if it didn't work.

I took it home, attached a hose at the bottom and opened the spigot...feeling very foolish. But the barrel started to fill AND water came out both! How could an empty barrel put out water and in so doing, get filled? It just didn't make any sense at all!

And the fact that God will fill us – meet our needs, grow us spiritually, give us resources that we didn't think we even had (energy, time, money, security with Him so we don't need others' approval, etc.) – WHILE we "put out" for Him is equally paradoxical.

We will *feel* and *think* we are too tired... too busy...too depressed... too inadequate... too poorly equipped to serve Him, but He thinks we are in a perfect position to really experience His power since we are at the end of our own. When we choose against those feelings we will find He disproportionately comes alongside and not only gives us what we need to serve Him, but fills us up beyond that!

We actually receive as we give. *We are never commanded in the Bible to evaluate how well others are doing in their "job" of loving us!* That view comes from our "consumer society"—how well are others serving me? We are commanded to love others in the power of Jesus Christ based on His love for us.

We don't wait until we get all our problems fixed before we give. Often we use the excuse —"I'm too messed up emotionally and relationally to give to someone else." "I'm going through some hard times in a relationship, at work, at school — I can't give to someone else until these are cleared up!!"

God has uniquely designed the cure to our many hang ups through the paradox: "I'll change you as you serve others." As we give to others we will be fulfilled by God, as He "fixes" me up. So often it is an act of faith—I *feel* acutely in need yet *choose* to act in love toward others, *trusting* that God will meet my needs.

More Illustrations:

A healthy physical body is the result of EXERCISE AS WELL AS NUTRITION.

THE DEAD SEA is dead because minerals and nutrients flow in, but it has no outlet. These minerals could sustain life, but the Dead Sea cannot support life because the nutrients are so concentrated. In the same way, Christians will not benefit from the spiritual nutrients that God supplies if they are unwilling to love others and practice what they learn. A vital relationship with Christ requires both receiving his love and giving it away to others.

The teachings and examples of Jesus:

(Jn. 4:34) Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work.

He modeled as he talked to the woman at the well. He was fed by serving her in this way. He told them that such ministry was a "food" they did not know about.

(Jn. 6:5-13) Jesus therefore lifting up His eyes, and seeing that a great multitude was coming to Him, said to Philip, "Where are we to buy bread, that these may eat?" (6) And this He was saying to test him; for He Himself knew what He was intending to do. (7) Philip answered Him, "Two hundred denarii worth of bread is not sufficient for them, for everyone to receive a little." (8) One of His disciples, Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, said to Him, (9) "There is a lad here who has five barley loaves and two fish, but what are these for so many people?" (10) Jesus said, "Have the people sit down." Now there was much grass in the place. So the men sat down, in number about five thousand. (11) Jesus therefore took the loaves; and having given thanks, He distributed to those who were seated; likewise also of the fish as much as they wanted. (12) And when they were filled, He said to His disciples, "Gather up the leftover fragments that nothing may be lost." (13) And so they gathered them up, and filled twelve baskets with fragments from the five barley loaves, which were left over by those who had eaten.

Next, after hearing him teach the principle (Jn. 4) he put them in a situation in which they could discover it for themselves. Notice that as they gave to others (in the midst of their own need), they found their needs met as a result (Isn't it interesting that there were 12 baskets of leftover food, the same number as there were disciples?)

(Jn. 13:1-17) Now before the Feast of the Passover, Jesus knowing that His hour had come that He should depart out of this world to the Father, having loved His own who were in the world, He loved them to the end . . . (3) Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all

things into His hands, and that He had come forth from God, and was going back to God, (4) rose from supper, and laid aside His garments; and taking a towel, He girded Himself about. (5) Then He poured water into the basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded . . . (12) And so when He had washed their feet, and taken His garments, and reclined at the table again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? (13) "You call Me Teacher and Lord; and you are right, for so I am. (14) "If I then, the Lord and the Teacher, washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. (15) "For I gave you an example that you also should do as I did to you. (16) "Truly, truly, I say to you, a slave is not greater than his master; neither is one who is sent greater than the one who sent him. (17) "If you know these things, you are blessed if you do them."

Based on believing in the sufficiency of his Father's love for him (vs 1-4), Jesus modeled sacrificial service and then commanded them to do the same. He told them that this lifestyle would be fulfilling (vs 17, *makarios* means "fulfilled").

(Acts 20:35) "remember the words of the Lord Jesus, that He Himself said, 'It is more blessed to give than to receive.'"

Whereas the world teaches that we will be happy when we get other people to love us the way we want them to and when our circumstances work out the way we want them to, Jesus teaches differently. He says that we will be fulfilled when we learn to love others the way he loves us. If we believe that we will be happy only when others love us the way we want, we will live in utter bondage. Then we will allow our fulfillment/happiness to be controlled by others. We must realize that people will never be equipped to meet our needs. Only Christ can provide true fulfillment.

Qualification:

Many times Christ would take time to rest and eat and taught his disciples to do the same (e.g. Mk. 6:31). He understood that our finite nature and our call to be stewards of all our resources (including our physical and mental capabilities) required rest. Rest enables us to go the long distance for Christ. If we do not have the ability to say "no" at any time, we will ruin ourselves and our families.

Most of us, however, are not apt to give too much, but are selfish. We are committed to our rest and comfort and need to recognize our selfishness as a barrier to spiritual growth. We need to commit to a servant lifestyle and learn balance in our finances, schedule, vacations, etc. as we serve God.

Common barriers to healthy Body-life

1. *Culturally glorified autonomy* (E.g. "Needing other people is a sign of personal weakness.")
(1 Thess. 3:1) Therefore when we could endure it no longer, we thought it best to be left behind at Athens alone . . .

Paul viewed being without Christian fellowship as the last resort.

When is the last time you accepted help from someone? Were you able to thank them and resist repaying them with gifts?

Do you recognize that God may communicate his wisdom to you through other members of the Body of Christ? We need to value the counsel of those who know God's word and learn it so we can help others grow.

2. *Codependence* (Unhealthy dependence on people rather than God. E.g. "You must meet my needs" vs. "God meets my needs, sometimes through you or others.")

(Phil. 4:10-19) But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at last you have revived your concern for me; indeed, you were concerned before, but you lacked opportunity. (11) Not that I speak from want; for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. (12) I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. (13) I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (14) Nevertheless, you have done well to share with me in my affliction . . . (19) And my God shall supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus.

Paul is thankful for their help, but makes it clear that he draws his life from Christ.

3. *Super-spirituality* ("Involvement with other Christians hinders my intimacy with Christ.")

(1 John 4:19,20) We love, because He first loved us. (20) If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for the one who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen.

You don't really love Christ if you aren't involved with his people.

Another danger that arises from separating yourself from other Christians is doctrinal imbalance.

(Col. 2:2,19) ... that their hearts may be encouraged, having been knit together in love, and attaining to all the wealth that comes from the full assurance of understanding, resulting in a true knowledge of God's mystery, that is, Christ Himself . . . (19) (The false teachers are) not holding fast to the head, from whom the entire body, being supplied and held together by the joints and ligaments, grows with a growth which is from God.

4. *Materialism* ("I'm too busy with my career/schooling/hobbies/house to be this involved with other Christians.")

(1 Jn. 2:10,15) The one who loves his brother abides in the light and there is no cause for stumbling in him . . . Do not love the world, nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Loving the values of the world-system is contradictory to loving one another with God's love.

(1 Jn. 3:14-17) We know that we have passed out of death into life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love abides in death. (15) Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer; and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him. (16) We know love by this, that He laid down His life for us; and we ought to lay down our lives for the

brethren. (17) But whoever has the world's goods, and beholds his brother in need and closes his heart against him, how does the love of God abide in him?

Note how John prioritizes relationships with other Christians over hoarding material goods.

What are you willing to sacrifice for your spiritual growth? Keeping a time-log will reveal how you really spend your time and perhaps clearly demonstrate your priorities.

5. *Tribalism* ("We are so busy with my children's [sports, music, etc.] that we don't have time for fellowship." Or "God first, my family second, church third . . ." or "My family is my ministry"). Col. 3:12 And so, as those who have been chosen of God, holy and beloved, put on a heart of compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience; 13 bearing with one another, and forgiving each other, whoever has a complaint against anyone; just as the Lord forgave you, so also should you. 14 And beyond all these things *put on* love, which is the perfect bond of unity. 15 And let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ richly dwell within you, with all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with thankfulness in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks through Him to God the Father. 18 Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives, and do not be embittered against them. 20 Children, be obedient to your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing to the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not exasperate your children, that they may not lose heart.

Notice that Paul speaks first of our identity as brothers and sisters in the Body of Christ, and then addresses our various social roles (including family roles). His point is that healthy family life is based on and must be rooted in vital involvement in Christian fellowship (see also Ephesians 5:1-33).

The Bible does not set these priorities or dichotomize these two areas of our lives. We should serve God in both contexts. Involvement in Body-life is necessary for a healthy home, just as healthy home life affects our impact on the Body of Christ.

Qualifications:

There may be times, particularly during family crises, where God calls on us to reduce our normal involvement in ministry in the church in order to take care of family needs (e.g. missing fellowship due to a child's illness, or more long term crises).

Even when we are considering structural changes during the life of our church, this is taken into consideration. Many home groups have changed to every other week to accommodate family ministry due to increased family needs.

NOTE: there is a handout entitled "Balancing Home and Church Ministry" for more reading on this. It is also on the web at

http://www.xenos.org/essays/balancing_min.htm

6. *Moral impurity* (Often manifested by withdrawal from fellowship &/or complaints about the church.)

(1 Jn. 1:7) . . . but if we walk in the light as He Himself is in the light, we have fellowship with one another . . .

Note the connection between close fellowship with other Christians and responding to God's moral guidance.

Sometimes, this is what keeps Christians from ever getting involved in Body-life. Other times, this is why we leave fellowship or distance ourselves from close relationships. Young Christian workers seem to rarely consider this cause when a younger Christian they are working with begins to withdraw.

7. *Rebellious attitude* ("Who are you to tell me what to do/how I should act?")

(Heb. 13:17) Obey your leaders, and submit to them; for they keep watch over your souls, as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

This comes to light when leadership calls for change, or when other Christians correct us. Whether or not we are rebellious is determined not when we agree with authority figures, but when we disagree. If we must have things our way, we have a problem (as long as the authority is operating within the parameters of scripture). We should realize that authority and discipline are expressions of love (for our benefit), rather than tools to exploit us.

(Heb. 12:6,9,10) Those whom the lord loves he disciplines, and he scourges every son whom he receives . . . (9) Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us . . . (10) they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, that we may share His holiness.

The author acknowledges that our earthly parents did not always deal with us properly, but this is no excuse to refuse to submit to God's discipline. Often times, rebelliousness is a reaction against unrighteous authority figures (e.g. unfair or abusive parents, employers, etc.). Authority figures can be unrighteous by being too permissive or too strict.

8. *Shy or introverted* ("I'm just shy and introverted." "I'm just not a people-person.")

(2 Tim 1:7) For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.

It's hard to be shy, but God can change you in this area, as he can in any other. You don't have to become an extrovert, but God still wants you to be involved in a meaningful way in the lives of other Christians.

Spiritual Gifts

As we are involved in Body-life and practicing Christian love, God will eventually reveal certain ministry strengths. These are called spiritual gifts. Scripture teaches that all Christians have at least one spiritual gift (bestowed at conversion). Gifts come in various combinations and degrees. (1 Cor. 12; Rom. 12; Eph 4:7-11; 1 Pet. 4:8-11).

Over time, you should become familiar with what your spiritual gifts are. If you aren't sure, don't hold back on serving others. You still have something to offer. As you focus on being involved with other Christians and practicing the "one another" imperatives, God will reveal to you the areas where you are gifted.

Discipleship

As you learn about God and begin following him, he will give you the opportunity to help younger, hungry Christians learn how to walk with him (Col. 1:28,29; 2 Tim. 2:2). We call this ministry [discipleship](#). This is one of the most exciting ministries God offers us in the body of Christ, and we believe that Christ has commanded all Christians to make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20). It certainly was a key feature of Paul's ministry:

(2 Tim. 2:2) And the things which you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses, these entrust to faithful men, who will be able to teach others also.

(Col. 1:28) And we proclaim Him, admonishing every man and teaching every man with all wisdom, that we may present every man complete in Christ. 29 And for this purpose also I labor, striving according to His power, which mightily works within me.

In the context of a close (mentoring) relationship, we meet regularly (often over several years) and practice the "one another" imperatives with them. We are committed to helping them in their spiritual vitality, character formation and ministry development. These folks often become some of our closest friends, and eventually become our colleagues in ministry.

NOTE: Healthy discipleship takes place within the context of involvement with many other Christians. God normally uses many different Christians to disciple us in different areas over a period of years. Beware of disciplers who want to minimize your involvement with other Christians.

Body Life as it relates to the other means of growth

The Interaction of Body Life (Receiving Christ's Love) With the Other Means of Growth	
Prayer	The church is to be a praying community. By precept and example, prayer plays a central role in the life of the church. Others can stimulate us to love and good works (Heb. 10: 24, 25), including by prayer. By establishing regular times to pray with others, we can strengthen our prayer habits, while gaining the discernment of the other members. Prayer is the spearhead of the church's ministry; opening doors, producing conviction in the hearts of those who hear, protecting those reached from Satan and granting spiritual empowerment to Christian workers.
Scripture	The church should teach the word of God. The church is ordered to equip its members to do the work of service (Eph 4:11,12). Instruction in the bible is central to this mission. The church should also use the bible to ground new Christians and even for evangelism at its public meetings.

<p>Discipline of the Holy Spirit</p>	<p>When we are undergoing difficult times of spiritual discipline from the Lord, Christian fellowship is sometimes the only thing that keeps us from falling apart. We were never meant to undergo significant breaking without the support of a loving community. At the same time I receive support, I have the opportunity to give support and to coach young Christians on how to understand God's hand in their lives during trials.</p>
<p align="center">The Interaction of Body-Life (Giving Christ's Love) With the Other Means of Growth</p>	
<p>Prayer</p>	<p>Those who are strong in ministry know how many times their ministries have spurred them on to intense periods of prayer. It is hard for such people to imagine what it would be like to feel the obligation to pray, but without the natural and healthy motivation created by ministry. As ministers, no longer are we merely praying because it's the right thing to do, or because we hope we can feel better as a result. Instead, there are real tasks to accomplish through prayer in the lives of others. Those who are established in defined and personal ministry consistently demonstrate more appreciation for prayer than those who are lacking this vital means of growth.</p>
<p>Scripture</p>	<p>When others are looking to us for guidance and help in their Christian walks there will be a new urgency in our study of Scripture. This is because as discussed earlier, Scripture holds the key to successful ministry. Feeding young believers the Word of God is basic to most kinds of ministry. Even service oriented ministry should be carried out in light of the Bible and should include the use of Scripture.</p>
<p>Discipline of the Holy Spirit</p>	<p>Spiritual discipline is largely intended to make us more effective in ministry. At the same time being in ministry will cause us to experience maximum benefit from discipline. We regularly find that those who are tied into extensive ministry are prepared and able to endure the necessary suffering to be conformed to the image of Christ for the sake of those people who depend on their ministry. Those who are not active in ministry find it too easy to run in the face of painful discipline.</p>

Charts from Dennis McCallum, "[Walking in Victory](#)," pp. 138, 153

The Word as a Means of Growth

Introduction

The last means of growth that we will study is the Word.

Importance of the Word as a means of growth

1. Essential for Spiritual Health

(1 Pet. 2:2* like newborn babes, long for the pure milk of the word, that by it you may grow in respect to salvation,)

What does this verse teach us about how we should approach the word?

Aim

Peter says the goal is not merely that we may "know," but that we may "grow."
This is the clearest passage that the Word is a means of growth ("salvation" here is a synonym for sanctification). See also Psalm 1; Matt. 7:24-27; Jn. 8:31,32; 17:17; 2 Cor. 3:18; Rom. 12:2; 1 Tim. 4:6. There is no growth apart from God's Word! No amount of intake from other means of growth can make up for intake of the Word!

Attitude

Newborn babies "drink for their lives." You need to be in the Word as though your life depends on it—because it does! This passage is not just about new Christians. Peter says that this attitude should characterize *all* Christians.

Appetite

Appetite is normally cultivated prayerfully—it doesn't just happen magically.

Most people don't start drinking beer or coffee because they like the taste. They drink them because they like the effect, then they *develop* a taste.

This is the way it usually is with the Word. It can be difficult, and it is not always super-exciting. But the effect is great, so this helps us cultivate an appetite for it (e.g. people who have been able to use a Bible passage to help someone).

First, *ask* God to give you an insatiable hunger for his Word. Then by faith, *expose yourself to it*, and watch God answer!

How often do we need to take in the Word?

The early church received apostolic teaching "daily."

(Acts 2:42) And they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

MANNA (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4) - They had to gather it daily—they could not store it up. In the same way, we need to expose ourselves regularly (daily) to the word to gain God's direction, strength, comfort, etc.

(Deut. 8:3) "And He humbled you and let you be hungry, and fed you with manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that He might make you understand that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by everything that proceeds out of the mouth of the LORD

The psalmist meditated on the Word "day and night (see Ps. 1:2; 119:97).

2. Essential for Spiritual Maturity

(Heb. 5:11-14**) Concerning him we have much to say, and it is hard to explain, since you have become dull of hearing. 12 For though by this time you ought to be teachers, you have need again for someone to teach you the elementary principles of the oracles of God,

and you have come to need milk and not solid food. 13 For everyone who partakes only of milk is not accustomed to the word of righteousness, for he is a babe. 14 But solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have their senses trained to discern good and evil.

These people were in a state of arrested spiritual development because they were relatively ignorant of God's Word. We can conclude that *spiritual maturity is dependent upon in-depth understanding of God's Word*. The author holds high standards of biblical understanding for the average Christian (to whom this is addressed).

Here are **four areas of competence every Christian should have in the Word**:

- **We should be familiar with the content of scripture** (Heb. 5:13 - "accustomed to the word of righteousness"). This means we should know all of the major doctrines of the Bible (sin, salvation, nature of Christ and man, etc.), and be familiar enough that we could find where they are taught.
- **We should be able to understand the more difficult biblical concepts.** We should be able to handle difficult biblical concepts like the relationship of the OC to the NC, the relationship of Jesus to Melchizedek, the blessings of the new identity, etc. This is why we teach bible study methods.
- **We should be able to teach others.** The gifted teacher is able to explain and apply "solid food" to groups of people. But even if we don't have this gift, we should at least be able to explain and apply biblical truths to other Christians. This is different from the spiritual gift of teaching, which not all Christians have (1 Cor. 12:29).
- **We should be able to discern good and evil** (1 Cor. 2:15 - "able to appraise all things") This refers to the developed ability to appraise every major area of life from the perspective of God's Word, and reach a verdict about whether it is true or false, of God or not, spiritually helpful or harmful (critical thinking about a Christian teaching or book, movie, lecture, discussion, relationship, parenting issue).

Again, this is different from the spiritual gift of discernment (1 Cor. 12:10) which is evidently the ability to detect demonic activity in ways that most other Christians cannot

"How quickly should we be able to attain this level of competence?"

We know these folks are behind schedule, but it's not clear how long they had been Christians. Another passage gives us a better idea.

(1 Cor. 2:13-3:2**) ...which things we also speak, not in words taught by human wisdom, but in those taught by the Spirit, combining spiritual thoughts with spiritual words. 14 But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised. 15 But he who is spiritual appraises all things, yet he himself is appraised by no man. 16 For WHO HAS KNOWN THE MIND OF THE LORD, THAT HE SHOULD INSTRUCT HIM? But we have the mind of Christ. 3:1 And I, brethren,

could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to babes in Christ. 2 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,

This was about two to four years after Paul planted this church. Therefore, we can look forward to a substantial level of maturity within a few years—if we get into the Word seriously and are willing to be "doers" as well as "hearers!"

In-depth knowledge of God's Word has been a core value in Xenos over the years. We have a reputation for many things (some good and some not so good), but one good thing is our reputation for, "knowing their Bible." Much of our fruit can be traced to our conviction that all Christians can and should learn the Bible *to this level*. We hope this remains a core value, but it won't happen automatically.

What would be some signs that we may be going soft in this area?

- *Leaving biblical study to the "experts."* If we think the four things mature Christians should be able to do with the Word (see above) are the sole responsibility of Bible teachers, we're ignoring what God says is normal for *all* Christians. What would this look like? A group of people faithfully attend Bible teachings but who never study the Bible on their own. While it's true that some individuals have a special aptitude for understanding and communicating God's word, *everyone* should understand the general content of scripture, including more difficult passages. We should also be able to use the Word to discern good and evil and teach the Bible others.
- *Emphasizing emotional experience at the expense truth.* If people speak of spiritual maturity more in terms of having emotional experiences with God than in terms of knowing God's Word, then we have a problem.
e.g. "I don't want to learn more of the Bible; I want to experience God."
Having emotional experiences with God is NOT wrong or unimportant; we can expect that this will happen as we grow. Bible knowledge alone does not equal spiritual maturity. But our emotions and experiences are simply not reliable guides. Unless our lives are firmly anchored in God's Word, our emotions and experiences will lead us away from God into all kinds of trouble.
- *Emphasizing love at the expense of truth.* "They don't need to be corrected, they just need to be loved and shown grace."
Loving people IS important; Paul says it is the key fruit of the Spirit. And there is such a thing as knowledge without love that is prideful and ugly. But love must be tempered and informed by the truth, or it degenerates into sentimentality (Phil. 1:9; 1 Jn. 3:18). It is not by merely loving one another that we grow and mature; it is by speaking the truth in love (Eph. 4:14,15).

To view God's correction or discipline as separate from His love and grace demonstrates an incomplete understanding of His love! For example, in Hebrews 12, His discipline in our lives is shown to be an act of love! And He calls us to include correction as one aspect of demonstrating His love as well.

3. Essential for Effective Ministry (2 Tim. 3:16-4:4)

Christians should use the Word of God in every area of Christian ministry.

(2 Tim. 3:16-17) All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; 17 that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work.

Four ways the Word can be used in ministry:

- **"Teaching": instructing people in biblical doctrine**
- **"Reproof/rebuke": confronting people about personal disobedience**
- **"Correction": illuminating areas of ignorance and replacing them with correct attitudes and actions**
- **"Training in righteousness": showing people what godliness looks like and how to attain it**

Added benefits from using the word in ministry:

- **Using the word deepens our understanding of it and its impact in our lives!**
Our ability to benefit from the Word will diminish past a certain point, unless we are willing to use it to serve others. Like the Dead Sea, we will be filled with all kinds of nutrients but void of life because there is no outflow.
- **Using the Word in ministry aids our retention of it** ("Use it or lose it.").
E.g. Sharing in home group what you've been learning here; helping younger Christians individually in their walk (shepherding and discipleship ministry) with what you've learned; praying for opportunities to share what you are learning.
- **Using the word equips us to give sound advice.** Unless our ministries are Word-oriented, they will be feelings/experience-centered, vulnerable to deception, etc. (more on this in a minute). Without the Word you will rely on human wisdom (yours and others), manipulation, personality, opinions, etc. If we believe that it is the Word that changes people's lives, we will make communicating it to others in ministry the very center of what we do!
(**Heb. 4:12**) For the word of God is living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.

God's Word is powerful. Are you using it in your ministry?

Relationship with the other Means of Growth

Instructors Note: This section is in the student notes and was also in their reading for this week. However, please note and teach the elaboration under the "ministry" section.

PRAYER

In our prayer life, the Bible provides the proper basis for knowing God by telling us what he is like. According to Jesus, effective prayer is based on the Word (John 15:7). John

promises that "if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know that He hears us in whatever we ask, we know that we have the requests which we have asked from Him" (1 John 5:14). This is a powerful promise, but it is conditional. We have to ask "according to His will." But how do we know what God's will is apart from Scripture?

MINISTRY

Serving love is a means of growth, but effective service involves "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). No ministry will have the power God wants it to have unless the one ministering is powerful in the Word of God. Even task-oriented ministers who may not teach or preach need the wisdom available in God's Word. We will not be effective at ministry or in our personal growth if we cannot fend off the attacks of Satan, and this is not possible unless we are able to cite our authority from Scripture.

Our primary "goal" as God's representatives is to direct peoples' attention to God & His perspective. That is most clearly discovered in His word (Col. 1:9,10) – not ours, not Xenos', not what someone once told me in a similar situation. Is this your approach in ministry?

BODY-LIFE

The basis for Christian fellowship is not only love but truth. The Body of Christ is a community of truth, and these two can never be separated. In Philippians 1:9-10 Paul prays, "that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ." Truth is the framework that makes real love possible. This is why we are called on to "speak the truth in love" to one another (Ephesians 4:15).

DISCIPLINE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

The discipline of the Holy Spirit is a means of growth, but it won't be effective unless we respond appropriately. We need Scripture, like that in Hebrews 12, to teach us how to respond to discipline in a way that promotes growth, as we shall see.

How should we study the Bible?

Find several time slots throughout the week to read the word on your own. A daily reading time would be ideal. There are daily reading programs available to lead you through the bible in a year or more (such as Carson's [For the Love of God](#)). Many bibles have a reading program in the appendix. Some people find it helpful to journal, or take notes or outline the book as they read it. Others find it helpful to approach their reading with a question to be answered. For instance, when reading Psalm 119 ask, "What are the benefits of being in the word regularly?" There are many different ways to study the Bible. Experiment with some to find what works well for you. Ask others what they do.

If you haven't taken *Intro to the Bible* yet, consider taking it as soon as you can. If you have taken *Intro to the Bible*, we encourage you to sign up for *Christian Ministry*. The *Christian Ministry* series provides a great foundation for a lifetime of ministry.

Memory Verses

1 Pet. 2:2* - We will always be dependent on God's Word for spiritual growth.

Heb. 5:11-14** - Knowing the word is essential for Christian maturity. The passage also teaches four areas of biblical competency for the mature Christian.

Assignment

Study for the exam.

In order to take Christian Ministry 1-3, you must have the recommendation of your home group leader AND turn in the questions at the end of the *Discipleship Packet* to the class registrar at the Xenos office.

Week 9 Exam Review Guide:

1. Know the common barriers to body life.
2. According to Hebrews 5:11-14, what are the four competencies in the Word that a mature Christian should be able to demonstrate?