

# *Living Out of Control*

## *Small Group/Devotional Guide*



*Overcoming our need to impose control on others,  
and to resist God's authority over us.*

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*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

*—Ephesians 5:21*

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*“The obsession to demand that things go the way we want is one of the greatest bondages in human society today. People will spend weeks, months, even years in a perpetual stew because some little thing did not go as they wished.... In the discipline of submission we are released to drop the matter, to forget it. Frankly, most of the things in life are not nearly so important as we think they are.”* –Richard J. Foster

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*“It is human nature to regard all things in the light of how they affect ourselves; We constantly strive and argue for our own advantage. But grace sets God before all else. When we are motivated by grace we claim no good for ourselves, nor arrogantly presume to know what is best; we are not contentious, nor prefer our own opinions to those of others; rather, in all we do we submit ourselves to God’s wisdom and judgment.”* –Thomas a Kempis

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## *Introduction*

Way back in 1998 I was poking around in the basement library of my church. The librarian had recently picked up some back issues of *Discipleship Journal* and laid them out on a display stand, where one in particular caught my eye. The article that made me pick up the magazine for a closer look was titled, “When It’s Wrong to Be Right.” Intrigued, I started reading:

“I’m not filling out this form again!” Angry words spewed from the customer next to me as he tried to arrange delivery of a clothes dryer. “Look,” he said as pushed the paper over the service desk to the clerk, “I’ve already filled this thing out three times. I’m sorry you people can’t get it right, but this time you do it.”

The clerk, chin jutting out, pushed the form back. “It wasn’t my mistake,” she replied. Customer and clerk glared at each other. Then a supervisor intervened, and the battle of wills ended.

*The customer is overreacting*, I thought. But who knows what frustrations had accumulated during his day, with this last encounter igniting the whole combustible pile. And that clerk! All she had to say was, “I’m sorry, sir, that you’ve been inconvenienced. I’ll be glad to take care of this for you.” But, no, she had to be right.

*She had to be right*. I felt a familiar convicting nudge. “And what about you...? What about the times in your marriage, in your friendships, when you have to be right, instead of soothing a situation with a soft word?” With this loving reproof, the Lord brought me face to face with yet one more stronghold in my life, one more thing to surrender: the right to be right.

The article that followed sparked a radical train of thought that I’m still riding more than a decade later. The more I observe relationships among families, church-goers, and co-workers, the more whole-heartedly I agree that it’s often wrong to be right and that this message needs to be more widely embraced.

I’M SURE MANY READERS WILL BE SKEPTICAL that an attitude of submissiveness can result in personal blessings and joy. At the outset, it can be tough to imagine what possible pleasure can result from giving up our rights, as scripture frequently calls us to do. Far from being a blessing, we imagine such an approach to life must necessarily leave us unfulfilled, frustrated, used, and abused. We believe the only thing enabling us to survive in a dog-eat-dog world where everyone is busy looking out for Number One is the tenacity with which we cling to some measure of control over our environment. Control in this sense means the ability to manipulate things and shape them to our liking. And among the things we most often feel the need to manipulate are our spouses, family, co-workers, neighbors, and authority figures. If we were honest, most of us would agree that the world would be so much better if everyone was just like us. So we spend much of our time and energy trying to make them so, by imposing our opinions and preferences upon the world.

A moment's reflection should make us realize that such a strategy is extremely unlikely to produce the desired results. All it's liable to achieve is to put us in conflict with our neighbor. We can be pretty sure that while we're doing our level best to conform him to our own image, he'll be doing his utmost to resist. In fact, he's not likely to be content with simply resisting, but will probably launch a counterattack. He too will sincerely believe that the road to contentment lies in manipulating the world according to *his* image of what it should be, and getting frustrated when *we* resist.

All this would be bad enough if I and my neighbor were the only two souls inhabiting our world, but when we multiply this potential for conflict by the 6.5 *billion* residents of this planet, it's not hard to see that our efforts to exert control over our lives and our relationships are doomed. And even that futility pales in comparison to the odds that we'll ever succeed in manipulating the Creator Himself to conform to our personal likes and dislikes.

Thankfully, scripture describes a better alternative. It's one that goes against what most of us have been taught to value: The biblical answer is submission. It's because this strategy is so counter-intuitive and, yes, subject to some abuses, that I've felt the discipline of submission to be worthy of an extended study. The importance which I've attached to the subject is magnified further by my belief that Christian leaders and teachers have not adequately emphasized it and we have thus left our brothers and sisters insufficiently prepared to live their lives with the fullness and joy God intended.

THE FOLLOWING LESSONS are intended primarily for use in small group settings, but are also suitable for private devotions. The study is divided into daily readings that should be completed individually by each group member. The study can thus be completed in four weeks. Following each commentary there are one or more discussion questions, and room to write down a few comments. Once each week the group should gather to review the past week's readings and share thoughts about **some** of the discussion questions. Leaders: Do **not** attempt to answer all the questions during your time together (1½ to 2 hrs is recommended, including time for gathering, prayer, and refreshments). Enough questions are provided to allow groups some flexibility to focus on those few that are most pertinent or interesting to them.

One more thing: In the very first lesson of this study I briefly mention the children's writer, Dr. Seuss. The good doctor is among the very best writers ever on the subject of submission. I strongly suggest finding a copy of his story "The Zax" and reading it as a useful and enjoyable supplement to this study.

*Peace,*  
*Bruce Heydt*  
*Director of Adult Discipleship Ministries*

## ***Getting Started***

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### **Day 1: Foolish Controversies**

#### **Scripture: Titus 3:1-9**

*Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and to show true humility toward all men.*

*At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.*

*This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone. But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless.*

#### **The Big Idea:**

Adoption into Christ's family requires a fresh outlook on our relationships with others.

#### **Commentary:**

It's easy to turn "avoid foolish controversies" into a catchy slogan. It's much harder to distinguish those disagreements that are merely foolish from those that have some substance and that involve issues worth struggling over. Harder yet is the art of cultivating a genuine spirit of inner peace that allows us to steer clear of conflict out of a genuine desire for accommodation, rather than holding out submission as a law to be grudgingly obeyed.

Yet difficult or not, it's a challenge we must be prepared to face. So much depends upon it. Harmony within our families hinges upon it. Unity within our congregations demands it. Fruitful relations between employee and employer thrive on it. Obedience to our God requires it. And our overall outlook on life sours without it.

This is not a challenge new to our own generation. In the 7th century, the king of Northumbria convened a council to settle a dispute among the clerics of his realm. The disagreement between two factions had grown so intense that it threatened to leave the church in tatters and

derail the spread of Christianity throughout the British Isles. The nature of the dispute that the king so desperately sought to resolve was two-fold: On what date should Easter properly be celebrated, and how should monks cut their hair? In the Roman tradition, monks always had a circular hairless spot shaved on the top of their heads. Celtic bishops preferred to require that a semi-circular hairless arc be shaved on their monk's foreheads. On these issues, the future of Christianity in Northumbria hung in the balance.

This tendency to allow trivial disputes to govern our lives is not confined to spiritual issues. Sadly, there are few arenas of life where we are not prone to make our personal preferences over non-vital issues the cause of conflict. The children's writer Ted Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss, addressed this phenomenon in his story, *The Butter Battle Book*, which opens with a grandfather teaching his grandson by saying: "It's high time that you knew of the terribly horrible thing that Zooks do. In every Zook house and every Zook town every Zook eats his bread with the butter side down!" Being assured this amounts to proof that the Zooks "have kinks in their soul," the young man grows up playing a key role in an escalating conflict that bears intentional similarities to the Cold War arms race.

We can chuckle over disputes about haircuts and buttered bread and shake our heads over the absurdity of it all; but we must also admit that we ourselves are too often guilty of equally trivial conflicts. We truly believe it matters what color carpet we install in the sanctuary. We allow ourselves to believe that it really matters how the chairs are arranged in our fellowship halls, which translation of scripture is most holy, how we serve the communion elements, whether we sprinkle or dunk in our baptismal ceremonies, or any of a hundred other "foolish controversies" that the Apostle Paul warns are "unprofitable and useless." It's high time we question such assumptions and attitudes.

**Challenge Yourself:**

Have you ever been caught up in a dispute that in retrospect seems like a "foolish controversy?" What was the divisive issue?

In the heat of the moment, trivial disputes often seem more important than they are. What can we do to avoid becoming "enslaved to all kinds of passions" when disagreements arise?

**Notes:**

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## Day 2: The Root of the Problem

### Scripture: Genesis 3:1-6

*Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden’?”*

*The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, but God did say, ‘You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.’”*

*“You will not surely die,” the serpent said to the woman. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”*

*When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.*

### The Big Idea:

Sin is, at its core, a usurpation of God’s authority and therefore constitutes our defiance against a proper attitude of submission.

### Commentary:

Satan’s temptation of Adam and Eve in the in the Garden of Eden was so clever and so brimming with innuendo that it pricks our sense of justice and sows seeds of doubt even today. It’s hard to read the biblical narrative without wrestling with an uncomfortable feeling that maybe God was, after all, being unfair by withholding the fruit. Why shouldn’t the knowledge of good and evil be freely available to Adam? Why was God holding out? Was he really afraid his creations would be like gods if they tasted it? Was he petty enough to want to keep them at a disadvantage in their relationship with him?

These are the kinds of thoughts that Satan intended his words to put in our heads. They beg the question: In what way did the act of eating the fruit make Adam and Eve “like gods”? What’s more, God’s response to their betrayal seems to reinforce the accusation that he intentionally withheld an amazing blessing from them:

### Genesis 3:22

*And the LORD God said, “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever.”*

A proper understanding of God's real motivation cuts to the heart of the discipline of godly submission and how it impacts our relationship with our Creator.

The first step in understanding God's purpose in the prohibition he imposed on Adam is to disregard our own experience in similar situations. Yes, we customarily act out of a sense of self-interest because we are, in a sense, in competition with each other and thus we feel a need to maintain a position of advantage. But we shouldn't think God was jealous of man's potential or felt his authority threatened in any way. His very nature would preclude such a motivation. An omnipotent Creator need no more worry about being upstaged by one of his creatures than a novelist need feel threatened that a character in one of his stories might steal his car. It is simply beyond our power to put ourselves on an equal footing with God, let alone gain an advantage over him.

But if not in power or authority, how else might Adam's and Eve's actions have made them "like God"? The answer, I believe, lies in the word "knowledge." In the Bible, "knowledge" often means something more than an accumulation of abstract information. We read that "Cain *knew* his wife, and she conceived." "Knowing" in this sense is an action verb; it implies understanding based on intimate personal experience. In other words, after eating the fruit Adam and Eve had a deep understanding of good and evil not because it had been thoroughly explained to them, but because they had personally sampled both for themselves. They had walked with God, and now they had knowingly disobeyed him. The sense in which they had become "like God" was that rather than submit to God's authority, they had taken it upon themselves to set their own standards of what was and was not permissible.

Of course, because there were many ways in which they remained very *unlike* God, things didn't turn out so well. Adam and Eve's standards of right and wrong flowed not out of omniscient wisdom, but from the rationale, "if it feels good, do it." The consequences of this brand of morality, foreseen by God from the start, have reverberated throughout human history ever since, to our own misery.

**Challenge Yourself:**

What are some of the most important ways we remain very *unlike* God? Why do you think God prevented Adam and Eve from eating from the Tree of Life following the Fall?

**Notes:**

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## Day 3: In God We Trust

### Scripture: Matthew 7:8-11

*For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened. “Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”*

### The Big Idea:

The desire to impose control over our surroundings stems first from a lack of trust in God’s basic provision.

### Commentary:

As we’ve seen, Adam and Eve struggled with a lack of trust that God would not withhold any proper blessing from them. As Americans, most of us can probably sympathize with them. We face perhaps a greater challenge than most of our neighbors around the world when trying to wrap our heads around this idea that submitting to others can be a blessing. From our childhood, we’ve been raised on tales of how the Minutemen rallied at the call to arms and thumbed their noses at King George. As a child, I remember thrilling to the televised exploits of Davy Crockett defending the Alamo. And I probably still have a Sergeant Rock comic book under my bed somewhere.

We Americans march to the beat of independence. Freedom of choice (more often than not, what we really mean is freedom from prudent self-restraint) is our highest ideal, and we’ll defend it to the last. So when presented with the idea that submitting to the will of others is an honorable, blessed approach to living in community, we find the concept downright unpatriotic if not outright laughable.

But which is more laughable: freely laying down our right to self-rule, or declaring our independence from an almighty, all-loving Creator who promises us eternal happiness if only we trust Him? After all, it’s one thing for colonists to rebel against a human king best remembered for holding conversations with an oak tree, and quite another to resist a holy and righteous God.

But it’s not just God to whom we are called to submit. Scripture advises us to “submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Faced with this unambiguous command, we might respond like Pharaoh, who when confronted by Moses’ ultimatums replied, “Who is the Lord, that I should obey him?”

The answer, according to scripture, is:

*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not be in want.  
 He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet  
 waters,  
 he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his  
 name's sake.  
 Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will  
 fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they  
 comfort me.  
 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You  
 anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows.  
 Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I  
 will dwell in the house of the LORD forever.*

If we won't trust this Good Shepherd, whom then shall we trust? Am I more likely to find contentment by submitting to this powerful, all-loving Creator, or by disregarding him and charting my own independent course? If Pharaoh were here he could give you the answer!

Yet too often we don't accept the truth that dependence upon God is the greatest kind of freedom. Deep down, we fear to trust in God for our basic provision—for our daily bread. Jesus himself struggled to help well-meaning people overcome this doubt in his own day:

**Matthew 7:9-11**

*“Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, will give him a snake? If you, then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!”*

Until we begin to trust God for the necessities of life, we'll not turn control of our decisions over to him, nor feel comfortable submitting to the will of others, but will seek happiness each in our own manner and be constantly entering into conflict with others doing the same.

**Challenge Yourself:**

In what aspects of life do you struggle most with trusting God to provide? Career? Relationships?

Why is trust sometimes so hard to maintain?

**Notes:**

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## Day 4: Contentment Under God

### Scripture: Ecclesiastes 5:18-20

*It is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him—for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work—this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart.*

### The Big Idea:

The need to exert control over our surroundings stems next from a dissatisfaction even with God's extravagant blessings.

### Commentary:

The ideal depicted in today's passage from Ecclesiastes is, unfortunately, one that we do not often live up to. In the last session we noted that one reason we are reluctant to submit our lives and choices to God is that we fear he will not come through with the basic necessities of life. The second reason, which we'll now consider, is that the necessities are rarely adequate to please us anyway. Nor are just a few occasional luxuries. We want more. In fact, we want *lots* more, and we want it now!

Solomon notes that God's generous spirit is a special gift intended for our enjoyment and contentment. How disappointed, then, he must be at our typical response. We live in a time and in a land where even the working classes routinely enjoy comforts that were once beyond the imagination of emperors and kings. Even within the short span of my own lifetime the catalogue of luxuries unknown to previous generations, but readily available to anyone with even my own modest income, includes laptop computers, DVD players, MP3 players, high-def TVs, smart phones, and GPS systems. You name it, there's an "app" for it. I can remember when the wonders of our high-tech age were epitomized by the phrase, "at the push of a button." Now, though, button-pushing is too much work; we insist on voice-activated appliances.

Yet are we any happier than our forebears? There's little evidence that we are. More often, we grumble over what we still do not have. Seldom do we share the sentiment expressed in today's scripture—one of satisfaction in "toilsome labor." Instead, we consider labor to be a curse, and long for a life of even greater ease. I recognize that there may be exceptions to the rule, but if you doubt that the rule exists just come and listen to the conversation that ensues the next time I ask my son to mow the lawn. And I'm no better. To me, nothing is more inconvenient on a Tuesday afternoon than a staff meeting.

The upshot of such attitudes is that we vent anger at God and our neighbors for all the nuisances of life and determine to do better by taking personal control of our surroundings. This is the inevitable response to any form of dissatisfaction we feel, and why the sense of entitlement that has become so prevalent throughout our culture is so extremely threatening to our spiritual health.

I glimpsed a vivid illustration of this mindset several years ago on a family trip to Disney World. I was feeling under the weather and so was pretty grouchy for much of the trip. One day as I walked through the park, I crossed paths with another family. The young daughter, who wore Mickey Mouse ears and had a balloon in one hand and an ice cream cone in the other, was bawling piteously while the father tried to console her. As I passed by, I heard enough fragments of their conversation to piece together the cause of the girl's tantrum. It was the ice cream cone. She'd wanted two scoops, but only gotten one.

With no little shame, I realized I'm not so different. Every day I have the privilege of enjoying the most amazing world ever created, filled with countless pleasures, with ice cream in hand to boot, and all I can think of is the second scoop I haven't got.

It's not just a matter of ingratitude, although that's part of the problem. But more than that, it's self-defeating. Our insatiable appetite for more results not in satisfaction, but in personal misery. Though surrounded by incredible blessings, we feel not joy, but bitterness.

But there's a way out. First, we can learn to take pleasure in what we already have. Then, we can learn to take pleasure not in what we own, but in what we can offer both to God and to others. I know such an outlook is possible because I know people who have undergone just such a transformation. Where once they stressed over income, now they take sincere pleasure in giving gifts and seeing the joy on the faces of those they bless. And while serving others through their church is an important part of their week, so is the time they spend with their grandkids. Because of their newfound generosity, they have less than ever, in one sense. But because of their new outlook, they have so much they can't share enough of it.

**Challenge Yourself:**

What simple "gifts from God" bring you pleasure and add spice to your life as you go about your daily routines?

**Notes:**

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## Day 5: Childish Ways

### Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:11

*When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me.*

### The Big Idea:

Thirdly, the need to exert control over our surroundings stems from an immature conception of what's truly important.

### Commentary:

The discipline of submission requires that we redefine our expectations of “the good life.” Some might call this a sacrifice, but I think it's more accurate to describe it as simply a lifestyle of contentment. Sacrifice implies that we consciously give up things we truly desire, and that it's a hardship. Contentment, on the other hand, suggests that we no longer feel the lure of those things. Doing without them is not a sacrifice because they are not what brings us joy. We've learned to find happiness in what we already have, rather than pine for what's lacking. Fruitful labor, the gratitude of neighbors, a smile on the face of a stranger we've befriended, a brisk walk on a cool autumn evening, the beauty of God's creation—these things become the “luxuries” that keep us going.

It's similar to the way our wants change as we mature physically and emotionally. I can still recall how, when my son was an infant, my wife and I would frantically search under furniture and behind seat cushions for his pacifier, because it was the only thing in the known universe that would put an end to his crying and make him happy. If he could have expressed himself adequately at the time, I'm sure he would have told us he could never hope to go through life without it and would fiercely contest any effort to make him do so. Now though, time has passed and his outlook has changed. Last year he married. Today, if I came to him and said, “Scott, I forbid you ever to suck on a pacifier again,” he'd only laugh at me. The pacifier has no control over him. It's no longer what brings him pleasure. His tastes have matured.

That's how it is when we mature in our spiritual life. Many people think that becoming a Christian means they'll have to give up all sorts of behaviors that bring them pleasure. Depending on what it is you enjoyed before accepting Christ, that might be true to a certain extent, but in a deeper sense Christian maturity doesn't involve giving up pleasures, but rather outgrowing many of the transitory things that once seemed terribly important. In their place we find even greater satisfaction in new pleasures we never before imagined. Or at least that's the potential. Unfortunately, sometimes such changes in outlook come slowly and in the mean-

time we struggle mightily with unhealthy wants and spend untold hours scheming about how we can fulfill them and fuming when we fail.

One of the blessings we learn to appreciate more as we take on a more mature outlook is relationships. Years ago my daughter made a friend when a young family moved into the house next door to us. Our new neighbors had previously lived in an isolated area and their few neighbors had had no children, so their own daughter didn't have any playmates throughout her first several years. As a result, she was thrilled to have a new friend living next door.

But as we watched Kristin and Jessica interact, an interesting if tense situation arose. Because Jessica had never before had a best friend, she'd never needed to share her toys. Kristin had never before needed to have patience with a friend who didn't conform to her own expectations. It was a rough summer before the girls learned that friendship is a two-way street, and is not about ordering your playmates to behave the way you want them to.

Fortunately, kids learn that lesson relatively quickly. With grown-ups, it's often much harder. Although most of us would presumably agree that God has not blessed us with neighbors and co-workers simply so they can cater to our own selfish wishes, we nonetheless often act as if it were so. We expect such behavior from immature kids; that's why we give them dolls to play with. A doll can be manipulated all day long and there's no harm done. But few adults are as accommodating, and relationships in which one or both of the principal parties expects the other to conform to a set of personal expectations are doomed to be rocky ones. If that's the kind of relationship we crave, we'd best stick to playing with dolls. But if we want to live in relationship with real people, we'll need to take a different approach.

**Challenge Yourself:**

Can you think of anything that you once cherished and felt you couldn't live without, but that now holds little appeal for you? What made the difference?

**Notes:**

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## Day 6: A Better Alternative

### Scripture: Psalm 19:7-11

*The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.*

*The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.*

*The fear of the LORD is pure, enduring forever. The ordinances of the LORD are sure and altogether righteous.*

*They are more precious than gold, than much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, than honey from the comb.*

*By them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.*

### The Big Idea:

Obedience to God's ways is not restrictive, but joyful, pure, sweet, and rewarding.

### Commentary:

We who live under God's new covenant in Jesus live by grace. As such, we tend to take a dim view of the covenant that preceded it, and to look down our noses at any emphasis upon law. We rightly point out that salvation is by grace not works, and that the law does not have the power to redeem us.

But discounting the law on that basis is sort of like saying that since America is off the gold standard, gold no longer has any value. While we live in a new age of grace, submission to God's law continues to be of immense importance.

Such deference to God's ways is not a means of salvation, but rather a mark of distinction. By honoring His commandments and guidelines for right living, we say to him, "We want to be your people. We want to be different; out of the ordinary. We're so eager to be in relationship with you that we're ready to let it affect every aspect of our lives."

We might, for example, decide that while Blue Laws are becoming a thing of the past, we will make an outward show of submission to God by refraining from shopping on the Sabbath. Or maybe we'll choose to demonstrate our willingness to stand apart by choosing not to observe Halloween—not because those who do are all going to hell (they aren't), but simply because it does not reflect the same set of values that God encourages us to embrace.

Such little acts of submission say that God is more important to us than conformity to contemporary culture, and that we're willing to forego some occasional pleasures or conveniences in order to honor Him. We respond not because we feel the law pressing on us and forcing us to act

against our will, but because our love impels us to appropriate expressions of how much God means to us. If we never feel moved by such thoughts, what does that say? It puts us on the same level as a child who only buys his mom a birthday gift because he's afraid he'll get spanked if he doesn't. That would not be a relationship worth celebrating. Hopefully, our relationship with our Creator is built upon better foundations.

Seen in this regard, submission is a spontaneous expression of unconditional love. It confirms that we place a desire to please God ahead of personal gain, and the result is that we gain everything worth having.

Think of how easy it would be to feel joy if we really, *really*, believed it was better to give than to receive. What a sense of release that would be! No longer would our happiness be contingent upon long-awaited but seldom seen acts of generosity on the part of others; instead, it could be ours whenever we choose to indulge in generosity ourselves. We'd have no need to manipulate others through guilt or shame, our happiness would be in our own hands, to be indulged in whenever and wherever we wanted. In the fantasy world J.R.R. Tolkien created for his book, *The Lord of the Rings*, the creatures called Hobbits don't receive gifts on their birthday, they hand them out. They understand how submission can be a joy, whereas placing expectations upon others often leads to disappointment and frustration.

And another book—the Bible—teaches a similar lesson. Scripture insists that submission to God, to earthly authorities, to neighbor, and to family can be a joy, and the key to harmony and productivity in our daily lives.

In the remainder of this study, we'll take a close look at how we can become more proficient at practicing submission in each of these arenas of life.

### **Challenge Yourself:**

What are some practical ways that we might honor God by willingly setting ourselves apart from contemporary culture? Perhaps you might follow through on your ideas by putting them into practice and monitoring your feelings as you go.

What was the most pleasure you ever took from giving a gift?

### **Notes:**

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## ***PART ONE: Submission within families***

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### **Day 7: The Head of the Wife**

#### **Scripture: Ephesians 5:22-24**

*Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.*

#### **The Big Idea:**

The relationship between the Church and Christ is the model for the union of husband and wife.

#### **Commentary:**

There's no getting around this passage (although as we'll see in the next lesson, it's only half the story), so we'd best deal with it right here at the outset. Few biblical imperatives are so likely as this one to get "liberated" women in an uproar and to send well-intentioned husbands ducking for cover. So let's all take a deep breath, count to ten, and then see what this passage is saying about marriage.

First, in contextualizing this message, we need to give it all the weight it deserves. It's a dangerous practice to reinterpret scripture simply because we don't like what it says. On the other hand, it would be equally unwise to place too little emphasis on the phrase "as to the Lord."

The Bible depicts the institution of marriage as an earthly reflection of a divine relationship, just as the earthly Tabernacle that the Israelites built in the Wilderness was said to be a shadow of the Temple that exists in heaven. The husband in this heavenly relationship is Christ, and his wife is the church. These two roles are reflected in the relationship between human husbands and wives.

Of course a human wife would be practicing idolatry if she lavished the same sort of worship upon her husband as upon Christ, so it is clear that when the Bible tells us that a wife should submit to her husband, it doesn't mean she should bow at his feet or sing unending praises to him. Neither does it mean she is to be subservient to him. God does not call us into a relation of forced servitude to Christ, nor does he call wives to be enslaved to their husbands' will.

Submission does mean she is called to put his interests above her own; his happiness before hers. Just as Christians are to place Christ at the center of our lives, the husband's proper place is at the center of his wife's life. As one commentator noted: "Such an arrangement doesn't involve a single limitation for the wife except those she imposes on herself."

Nor does it permit a single abuse or authoritarian unkindness from the husband.” After all, there’s no need to demand what has already been freely and joyfully offered.

Most likely, some will protest that even this goes too far, asking why a wife should put her husband’s welfare before her own. This brings us right back to the point at which we opened this study—the resistance we all—not just wives—put up against the whole notion of submission. We resist because we view submission as an insult to our status or our dignity, rather than as an expression of freely offered love. Seen in its proper light, submission doesn’t ask a wife to give her husband anything she hasn’t already freely and delightedly pledged to provide.

In a culture in which half of all marriages end in divorce, might it be that married couples place too much emphasis on what benefits they expect from the relationship—their return on investment—and somewhere along the way have lost the ability to take pleasure in giving?

How different would it be if more marriages reflected the model provided by O Henry in his short story “The Gift of the Magi”? Henry wrote of a pitifully poor husband and wife who could not afford to buy each other Christmas gifts. Ultimately the wife, Delia, cuts off her beautiful hair and sells it to buy a platinum chain for her husband’s watch. For his part, her husband sells his watch to buy combs for Delia’s hair.

Delia describes the motivation for her sacrifice, reflecting on “many a happy hour...planning for something nice for him. Something...just a little bit near to being worthy of the honor of being owned by Jim.” Very likely, this sort of language shocks many contemporary readers, but again, given the outcome of so many marriages we have good cause to question contemporary sensibilities.

Certainly, that’s the lesson Henry himself intends us to take from the story, as stated in his tongue-in-cheek conclusion: “I have lamely related to you the uneventful chronicle of two foolish children...who most unwisely sacrificed for each other the greatest treasures of their house. But in a last word to the wise of these days let it be said that of all who give gifts these two were the wisest.”

### **Challenge Yourself:**

It’s often said that marriage is a 50/50 partnership. Do you think this is a helpful perspective on the marriage covenant? Is there a better one?

### **Notes:**

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## Day 8: As Christ Does the Church

### Scripture: Ephesians 5:25-30

*Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church—for we are members of his body.*

### The Big Idea:

When it comes to biblical submission within the context of a marriage, the feeling is—or should be—mutual.

### Commentary:

In the previous lesson we looked at a wife's submission to her husband and noted that when it comes to a biblical perspective on marriage that's just half the story. The verse that immediately follows those we considered in lesson 7 addresses husbands, and they too are advised to pattern their relationship with their wives after Christ's union with the Church.

This time husbands are told to "love" rather than "submit." In practice, I have trouble perceiving any substantial difference in these two commands, and I believe we are justified in considering these two words to be calling us to the same response. It is simply a mistake to think that the Bible provides justification for husbands to dominate their wives. The relationship is intended to be one of *mutual* voluntary surrender.

And this is precisely where the analogy with Christ and his Church is so instructive. In that relationship, it's easy to understand and accept the reasonableness of the church's submission to Jesus, but if we neglect to thoughtfully consider the other side of the relationship, we risk concluding, mistakenly, that this analogy to human marriage provides ample justification for believing that a wife's place in a godly marriage is one of intrinsic inferiority.

But Christ does not dominate the church in the sense of being dictatorial. Rather, scripture puts Christ's role into a perspective that is especially instructive to all men who desire to be godly husbands:

### Philippians 2:5-7

*Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to*

*be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.*

This is one of the many biblical truths which, while counter-intuitive and hard to visualize, we are nonetheless challenged to live out. Alongside truths like, “the first shall be last” and “all those who lay down their life will find it,” the husband in a godly marriage, finding himself in the role of “head of the wife,” is immediately called to consider his position nothing to be grasped, but to make himself the servant of his bride. That is, he is called to submit to her. To what extent? Christ descended from heaven and went to the cross for his bride in order to raise her toward heaven. So should the godly husband. In *Syzygy*, Johnnie C. Godwin writes: “God entrusts the husband with a stewardship responsibility to help the wife reach her potential so that she’ll be returned to God better than when she was given.”

It would be easy to dismiss such notions as pie-in-the-sky religious idealism if hard statistics didn’t back them up. In February 1994, *U.S. News & World Report* noted: “Berkeley psychologist Robert Levenson is now in the process of studying [married] pairs who have been together 40 years or more. So far, reports from the front indicate that these couples are masters in soothing one another and preventing each other’s distress during conflict.”

Think once again of “The Gift of the Magi.” Like the subjects of Levenson’s research, the fictional couple’s love and commitment toward each other were more powerful than any desire for self. Their greatest contentment came from pleasing each other. We read the story and are moved nearly to tears by its sad poignancy. Jim and Delia, though, did not find their experience an occasion for sadness. Rather, they recognized the selfless motivation behind their mutual gift giving, rightly understood how richly blessed their lives were, and the result was joy.

### **Challenge Yourself:**

Husbands: In the previous lesson we considered marriage as a “50/50” partnership. Are you willing to freely give up your half in order to advance your wife’s welfare?

Wives: How willing are you to receive your husband’s gifts? Are you able to receive them gladly as a sign of his love and commitment, or do you feel like you’re perfectly capable of fending for yourself?

### **Notes:**

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## Day 9: Obedience

### Scripture: Hebrews 5:7-8

*During the days of Jesus' life on earth, he offered up prayers and petitions with loud cries and tears to the one who could save him from death, and he was heard because of his reverent submission. Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered.*

### The Big Idea:

Jesus modeled the perfect parent/child relationship.

### Commentary:

Just as Christ provides the ultimate model of a loving husband, he also embodies the ideal of an obedient child. And such an example is needed no less than his model of submission in marriage.

Bill Allin, in an article titled "Turning It Around: Causes and Cures for Today's Epidemic Social Problems," notes:

In the western world we have come to accept that teenage rebellion is part of the process of coming of age. It's almost expected.... The problem is that they don't know how to rebel constructively, so they rebel in ways that often turn out to be destructive. Consequently, western countries tend to have the highest rates of their citizens in prison (the US is the highest in the world, by a good margin) and the highest rates of mental illness and people taking mood-enhancing or mood-controlling medications to make their lives bearable.

Allin recommends a greater emphasis on teaching life skills to our young adults as the solution to this unfortunate trend, and surely, that's part of the answer. But clearly this is not just an educational issue, but an ethical and spiritual one. Thousands of years of social history have amply demonstrated that reforming behavior by drumming a set of rules into a miscreant's head yields disappointing results. That's because the real problem is not caused by our external environment, but by what lies inside each one of us—a sin nature. More specifically, the sin of pride persuades us that we deserve more from our parents and because we're not getting everything we deem to be ours by right, we rebel. (Conversely, pride might also persuade us that we don't need *anything* from our parents, including sound advice.)

An article appearing in *Christianity Today* noted:

In the 1950s a psychologist, Stanton Samenow, and a psychiatrist, Samuel Yochelson, sharing the conventional wisdom that crime is caused by environment, set out to prove their point. They began a 17-year study involv-

ing thousands of hours of clinical testing of 250 inmates here in the District of Columbia. To their astonishment, they discovered that the cause of crime cannot be traced to environment, poverty, or oppression. Instead, crime is the result of individuals making, as they put it, wrong moral choices.

Since social reformers can claim only very limited success in combating the causes of childhood rebellion, maybe we ought to give God's word another try. Not surprisingly, scripture's answer includes submission:

**1 Peter 5:5**

*Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."*

Once again the counter-intuitive nature of a submissive attitude comes through in Peter's advice. Yielding to our elders, the Apostle promises, results in greater satisfaction, because God himself supplies the necessary grace.

And again, this truth is exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus.

**John 5:19**

*Jesus gave them this answer: "I tell you the truth, the Son can do nothing by himself; he can do only what he sees his Father doing, because whatever the Father does the Son also does."*

**Challenge Yourself:**

Bill Allin's article notes: "In the western world we have come to accept that teenage rebellion is part of the process of coming of age. It's almost expected. This is not the case in most of the world where the teen years are ones where a child transforms into an adult, not seamlessly but without large scale rebellion." What might account for this cultural difference?

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## Day 10: Training and Instruction

### Scripture: Ephesians 6:4

*Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*

### The Big Idea:

Even the king of the castle serves the Lord.

### Commentary:

Just as a biblical outlook on marriage presupposes mutual, reciprocal submission, so too a godly parent/child relationship is not one-sided. True, God's word calls on children to submit to parents, but now we see that parents, for their part, are called to devote themselves first to God's service, and next to the welfare of their children.

Parenting is a service rendered to God in the sense that he entrusts every parent with the welfare, education, and spiritual development of those to whom he has given life. In a very real sense, we are only foster parents caring for God's children on his behalf.

The Proverbs reflect the proper parental approach to child-rearing. The position of authority held by the parents is to be wielded sacrificially for the purpose of equipping their charges for citizenship in God's kingdom. To this end, assigning chores and other responsibilities to our children is an effective part of the training process. In fact, according to Jesus it is at the heart of the matter: "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much...."

The danger for parents is the tendency to forget this nurturing and equipping role and come to consider chores as something our children owe us in order to make our own days a little bit easier. There's nothing wrong with that as far as it goes, but it accomplishes little in the way of building character.

In contrast, the words of the book of Proverbs reflects an implicit recognition of a parent's duty to equip his children for adulthood:

### Proverbs 6:20-23

*My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your heart forever; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you. For these commands are a lamp, this teaching is a light, and the corrections of discipline are the way to life....*

and...

**Proverbs 22:6**

*Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.*

Parents who are lax at equipping their children in this way—perhaps thinking they are being very tolerant and amiable and therefore “good parents,” are in fact being negligent. It is every parent’s duty to discipline his children. (Whether they are grateful or not!)

In addition, parents serve as stand-ins for God on earth. While Scripture affirms the appropriateness of a child’s submission to his parents, this is best understood as a rehearsal for the submission all of us will freely offer to our heavenly Father in eternity. The deference earthly parents receive is not entirely due them on the basis of their own dignity, wisdom, and authority, but rather because they are temporary representatives of God’s authority. As children, when we honor our earthly parents, we are honoring our true, eternal Father.

This too, is easy to overlook in the midst of the day-to-day responsibilities of life. Fathers speak jokingly of being the king of the castle, but then forget that it’s a joke and begin to believe it. The truth is, however, that earthly fathers are not kings, but stewards.

**Challenge Yourself:**

Parents: In what ways might understanding your role as a “temporary stand-ins for God” influence the way you exert authority over your children?

Children: How might viewing your parents in this way affect how you relate to them?

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## ***PART TWO: Submission of neighbor to neighbor***

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### **Day 11: Serving our Appetites**

#### **Scripture: Romans 16:17-18a**

*I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them. For such people are not serving our Lord Christ, but their own appetites.*

#### **The Big Idea:**

Submission to neighbor begins with sound teaching and an accurate understanding of God's own nature. Until we obtain these, we are on shaky ground and subject to our own preconceptions.

#### **Commentary:**

It can be very difficult to separate the omnipresent God of heaven from the God of common imagination who exists only inside our own head. You know the God I'm referring to: He's that grandfatherly gentleman with the long white beard and the deep voice. More than that, he's the God who always answers prayers, helps those who help themselves, and who, while he loves everyone, is especially fond of blessing America. In short, he's the God we've created in our own image, rather than the real God who did things the other way 'round and is who he is whether we like it or not.

Most often, our frequent misperceptions about God are harmless. If Michelangelo chose to depict God in a certain way on the Sistene Chapel ceiling, that's his right as an artist. But sometimes we forget that this God we struggle to picture inside our own heads and the God of heaven are two different entities—one is real, one is not. And when we blur the distinction, we're liable to serve an imaginary God and maybe even launch unholy crusades in his name.

Erroneous assumptions about God come from multiple sources. Paul warns the Roman Christians to be wary of those who intentionally distort God's word. But more often, I think, the bad teaching comes from sincere teachers who have the best of intentions but who have themselves been inadequately trained, or who perhaps have let their passion get ahead of their understanding. (And of course, I may be one of them!)

Generalizations are dangerous, but I think it's fairly safe to say that only a minority of folks who call themselves Christians have ever participated in serious, formal Bible study. In fact, many have not read the Bible in any serious or systematic way. Therefore it's appropriate to ask where their intense opinions about God's ways and how he wants us to

behave originate. Often, I’m afraid, the answer is that we create an imaginary God who reflects our own prejudices, and then inflict that imaginary God on our neighbors as if he were the real thing.

One unfortunate result of this is what’s come to be known as “worship wars,” or more accurately “culture wars,” in our churches in which conflicting conceptions of what constitutes “godly” worship cause rifts and fractured communities.

For myself, I’ve had more than enough of books promoting one view or another, of seminars and lectures that dwell tediously on the subject, and of the waste of time and energy that’s been devoted to it. Enough. It’s a foolish controversy if ever there was one and Satan must be laughing his damned head off at the whole bunch of us. It’s time to get over our personal appetites and ruin Satan’s day by putting it behind us and getting on with God’s work. The God of the Bible that is, whose will is made perfectly clear: “Do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were; submit to the LORD. Come to the sanctuary, which he has consecrated forever. *Serve* the LORD your God, so that his fierce anger will turn away from you.” (2 Chronicles 30:8) and “*Submit* yourselves, then, to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.” (James 4:7)

Only by first submitting ourselves to God’s revelation and his will are we freed from the imaginary gods we too often worship and thus are able in good conscience to submit to neighbors.

**Challenge Yourself:**

Where did you obtain your current understanding of God’s ways? In Sunday school as a child? In worship services though the preaching? Books? Television? Conversations with Christian friends? How reliable do you think each of these sources might be? Have you ever submitted yourself to an intensive Bible study experience? If not, would you be willing to now?

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## Day 12: Humility

### Scripture: Ephesians 4:2

*Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*

### The Big Idea:

Pride is both the strongest and most common obstacle to submissiveness.

### Commentary:

Pride is the arch-enemy of submissiveness in all of the relationships we're considering in this study. In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis writes: "Every one has heard people quarrelling. Sometimes it sounds funny and sometimes it sounds merely unpleasant...." But however it sounds, the sound is universal. Not only has everyone heard others quarreling, every one of us does it ourselves. We're born with a proclivity to it. No parent ever had to teach children how to have a tiff. Pride's place in our everyday lives is undeniable. The question is, *why* do we bicker? What drives us to harsh words and a single-minded determination to prove ourselves right—and not only right, but justified, therefore, in going to nearly any extreme to compel everyone else to fall into line behind our way of thinking? What is it that prevents us from saying, "Have it your way," except as a sarcastic last shot at an opponent whose own single-minded determination to have his way overpowers our own? Lewis himself provides the answer:

According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride.... Now what you want to get clear is that Pride is essentially competitive.... Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest.

No doubt, Lewis has put his finger on the real issue. This competitive spirit rebels at the thought of submission—of giving in to any idea that is not our own or any opinion we don't share. Once we allow others to interact with us on a level playing field, we're no longer above the crowd, and our pride objects. We all say we enjoy living in a democracy, but when it comes to our personal preferences, isn't it true that we'd really prefer an autocracy, with ourselves at the pinnacle of power?

You can see this reality at work in many of our daily interactions with our neighbors. Perversely, it often masquerades as generosity. Suppose for example that your church is planning a fellowship dinner, and volunteers are needed to provide the desserts. One member immediately chimes in and agrees to do all the baking, and everyone praises this person for her gracious assistance. Then as the planning session ends and you offer her your personal thanks, she replies, “Well, I didn’t want to leave it up to Mrs. Neidermeyer; her cooking is atrocious. I knew that if we wanted this done right, I needed to do it myself.” Most of us can probably think of many instances of this prideful brand of service, which is really nothing more than an attempt to impose control over our circumstances and draw attention to ourselves. True enough, such an attitude might lead to a more flavorful *crème brûlée*, but in the long run you’ll pay for it with fractured relationships. Is it really worth it?

That’s not simply a rhetorical question, but the crucial essence of every decision to impose our will on others. There are, after all, issues over which we should never compromise; over which we should be prepared to do battle on God’s behalf. But these are relatively few and far between, and the quality of our pot-luck meals, along with most of the other things we fret over, is not among them.

Our answer to this vital question needs to be tempered by the understanding that every time we clash with a neighbor, whatever the outcome, we damage that relationship to some degree. We may “win” the present dispute, but we will need to continue interacting with that neighbor in the future. To the extent that we force our will upon her today, all future interaction will be that much more stressful and less productive. Is that too high a price to pay to avoid a runny custard? “Is it worth it?” is therefore the key question anytime we’re tempted to dig in our heels in order to get our way.

**Challenge Yourself:**

Make a short list of some issues over which you would consider it justifiable to make no compromises. If you are participating in a small group, compare your list with the rest of the group’s.

**Notes:**

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## Day 13: Mercy and Compassion

### Scripture: Zechariah 7:9

*This is what the LORD Almighty says: “Administer true justice; show mercy and compassion to one another.”*

### The Big Idea:

Humility enables relationships based on equity rather than advantage.

### Commentary:

A survey conducted by the Barna Group in October 2006 revealed: “New rules of morality affect how young adults interact with others, creating less civility, respect, or patience. Busters were twice as likely as their parents to use profanity in public, to say mean things about others behind their back, to tell something to another person that was not true, to do something to get back at someone who hurt or offended them, to take something that didn’t belong to them, and to physically fight or abuse someone.”

Those born in the 1970s or after are sometimes called “The Me Generation.” It’s said that the defining characteristic of this generation is the belief that that the self comes first.

The “Generation Me Website” says: “Generation Me has never known a world that put duty before self, and believes that the needs of the individual should come first.... ‘Be yourself,’ ‘Believe in yourself,’ ‘Love yourself...’ These are some of our culture’s most deeply entrenched beliefs....” This worldview is the complete antithesis of godly submission, and thus presents us with a clear choice. Either we can buy into the world’s philosophy or we can make a conscious choice to live by God’s word. Choosing the latter involves laying aside thoughts of personal gain or status and instead using whatever strengths or advantages we hold in our relationships for the betterment of those around us.

This brand of humility is epitomized by the most memorable act of submission found in the gospels:

### John 13:3-5

*Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples’ feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

Had Jesus chosen to demand all the privileges due to him, no one could have denied his claim to superiority. In other instances, similar claims of superiority have been more readily if less justifiably touted, making the contrast between bigoted self-interest and compassionate fellowship all the more striking.

The 1936 Berlin Olympics provided the German Nazi regime with an opportunity to demonstrate to the world the supposed superiority of the so-called “Aryan master race.” Hitler himself eagerly embraced the event as a showcase of Nazi propaganda. So it was practically a national scandal when Jesse Owens, a black American track-and-field star, won four gold medals in competition against Hitler’s finest.

But amid the politically charged atmosphere, one German athlete rose above Nazi propaganda and, by demonstrating a godly brand of compassionate friendship, did better than winning a medal.

During the qualifying rounds for the long jump competition, Owens fouled on his first two attempts, leaving him with only one more chance at advancing to the medal round. His main rival, a German by the name of Luz Long, seemed poised to win the gold medal. But Owens qualified on his last jump, and then went on to victory. Long was the first to congratulate him and the two celebrated Owens’ victory together. “It took a lot of courage for him to befriend me in front of Hitler,” Owens observed. “You can melt down all the medals and cups I have and they wouldn’t be a plating on the 24-karat friendship I felt for Luz Long at that moment.”

Despite his disappointment at not winning the gold medal, and at the risk of repercussions from a regime that certainly did not share his sense of sportsmanship, Long demonstrated that compassion, fellowship, justice, and submission to neighbor includes the entirety of God’s family, not just those who look and think like we do.

**Challenge Yourself:**

Mercy and justice for all includes not just friends and neighbors, but strangers as well. What are some ways we might spur each other on toward expressing Christ-like love to our brothers and sisters around the world?

**Notes:**

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## Day 14: Do Unto Others

### Scripture: Mathew 7:12

*So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*

### The Big Idea:

Submission is a universal principle, owed to all regardless of worthiness or rank.

### Commentary:

The story of the Berlin Olympics illustrates an important truth which might easily be overlooked. All this talk about the submission of wives to husbands and children to parents, as well as relationships we've yet to consider such as employee to employer and citizen to ruler, may create the impression that what we're advocating is the submission naturally expected of the weaker to the stronger, the inferior to the superior. But that is not the key to Christian submission. That brand of submission is rather a characteristic of the overbearing domination too often practiced (read "inflicted") by those who believe submission is owed to them alone.

Christian submission, on the other hand, is based on the recognition that:

### Galatians 3:28

*There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.*

True, employee *should* submit to employer, but Christ-followers are called to something both higher and deeper than fitting ourselves into our proper slot in a hierarchical command structure. Rather than being an acknowledgement of another's superiority or greater authority, submission is simply an attitude of respect and love. As such, it is the appropriate way of interacting with *all* our acquaintances, not just those who hold some tangible form of power over us.

The weakness of this definition is that the word "love" in a Christian context also requires explanation. Love in this sense does not describe a warm, affectionate emotion, but rather the conscious choice to seek the best for another soul, regardless of how much you personally like or dislike the way that person conducts herself, dresses, worships, talks, or discharges the authority she's been granted.

Fortunately for all of us struggling to better understand this variety of love, the Apostle Paul took pains to define it in his memorable words to the church at Corinth:

**1 Corinthians 13:2-7**

*If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.*

*Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.*

This New Testament definition coheres with Zechariah’s call for justice, mercy, and compassion. These are not blessings due only to those who exercise formal authority over us. We owe it as well to those beneath us in the hierarchical structures that order our spiritual, civil, and familial relationships. Submission is therefore not an implied acknowledgement one way or another of someone’s social status relative to our own, and so we ought to feel no sense of inferiority, shame, degradation, or hurt pride at the thought of submitting to anyone else, whomever or whatever they may be.

**Challenge Yourself:**

Do you find it easier or harder to show kindnesses to those who wield formal authority over you? To those over whom you hold authority? It’s said that power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. Do you agree? How can we insulate ourselves against the temptation to use positions of power to our own advantage at the expense of justice to others?

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## Day 15: The Law of Love

### Scripture: John 13:34-35

*“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another.”*

### The Big Idea:

If you sincerely desire the good of others, you will rarely take a misstep when it comes to the discipline of submission.

### Commentary:

As has already been noted, it's easy to make God's call to submissiveness into a burdensome law. In our desire to understand the discipline and in our attempts to flesh out the principles of submission into a practical lifestyle we naturally want concrete examples, checklists, and easy-to-follow rules. But that would be a mistake.

The Pharisees made just such an error. In their sincere, passionate attempts to apply God's laws, they added layer upon layer of interpretation, application, and amplification until it took a scholar trained by years of study to make sense of what supposedly pleases God and what doesn't. In response to this approach to justice, Jesus said, “They tie up heavy loads and put them on men's shoulders, but they themselves are not willing to lift a finger to move them.”

In contrast to this very natural desire to have an exhaustive and explicit set of rules to regulate our actions, Jesus put forth the law of love. The principle shortcoming of any list or set of codes is that it can never anticipate all situations in which it might be applied and therefore can never be complete. All attempts to make it so simply serve to pile regulation upon regulation, exception upon exception, contingency upon contingency, until the law becomes exactly the sort of burden that Jesus so appropriately decried.

The law of love, on the other hand, leaves the work of day-to-day application to the individual child of God. This has the consequence of requiring each one of us to be sensitive to the needs of others and discerning of God's will, as well as being both flexible and persistent enough to react to the sometimes bewildering variety of real-world circumstances in all their complexity. But it also puts things in their proper order by emphasizing our need to react to our circumstances in an appropriate, compassionate, and loving manner, rather than fixing our attention of the mechanical performance of a fixed set of rules.

Jesus was, of course, the perfect practitioner of the law of love, and it got him into hot water on more than one occasion with those religious

authorities who believed that obedience to God requires an inflexible and rote adherence to pre-established rules.

**Mark 3:2-4**

*Some of them were looking for a reason to accuse Jesus, so they watched him closely to see if he would heal him on the Sabbath. Jesus said to the man with the shriveled hand, “Stand up in front of everyone.” Then Jesus asked them, “Which is lawful on the Sabbath: to do good or to do evil, to save life or to kill?”*

Jesus was asking, “Which is more important, the letter of the law, or its spirit?” The purpose of the law is to ensure that justice is done. When we use it to justify cold-heartedness or apathy toward those in need we have strayed outside the intentions of the law and are abusing it rather than honoring it.

In contrast to expanding upon the law in order to account for every possible application as the Pharisees tended to do, Jesus reduced it to just two overruling principles:

**Matthew 22:37-40**

*“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”*

**Challenge Yourself:**

Have you ever stepped outside the letter of the law, or outside the common perception of acceptable behavior, in order to meet someone at their point of need? What was the result?

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## Day 16: Serve Faithfully

### Scripture: 1 Peter 4:10

*Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms.*

### The Big Idea:

Submission is a proactive discipline. It involves not only passively allowing others to exercise their initiative, but also actively enabling them.

### Commentary:

Today's scripture reading emphasizes the truth that the gifts and talents God blesses us with are neither causes for boasting nor tools for personal advancement. Rather, they are assets to be expended with the aim of serving our neighbors. That, in fact, is the way we enhance our own status, according to Christ: "If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, and the servant of all."

The Apostle John as well wrote of the essential nature of supporting those in the Body of Christ who are especially devoted to the spread of the gospel:

### 3 John 1:5-8

*Dear friend, you are faithful in what you are doing for the brothers, even though they are strangers to you. They have told the church about your love. You will do well to send them on their way in a manner worthy of God. It was for the sake of the Name that they went out, receiving no help from the pagans. We ought therefore to show hospitality to such men so that we may work together for the truth.*

In a way, the community of faith works like a modern army. To fight effectively, every combat soldier needs the support of what's commonly called a "logistical tail." This refers to all the support personnel needed to feed, supply, transport, and communicate with the front-line troops so that they can do their job effectively. The work of these support services is often less visible than that of the infantrymen, but it is absolutely vital to the success of the mission.

The community of faith requires a logistical tail, too, if it is to function at peak efficiency. To fulfill Jesus' commission to "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation," we need not only those willing to be front-line soldiers, but also support troops dedicated to financing the work of evangelism, housing missionaries, and training the next generation of workers.

The reason that this requires an attitude of submission is that just like in the military, these support services are typically low profile and far less glitzy than the work being done by the front-line soldiers. For this reason, those who are motivated by a desire for acclaim or to impress their brothers and sisters with their talents are likely to shy away from such roles in favor of those that will better enhance their own status.

But those who defer their own glory for the good of God's kingdom will recognize the importance of these support roles for the good of the body of believers, acknowledging Paul's teaching to the early church:

**1 Corinthians 12:18-27**

*But in fact God has arranged the parts in the body, every one of them, just as he wanted them to be. If they were all one part, where would the body be?*

*As it is, there are many parts, but one body. The eye cannot say to the hand, "I don't need you!" And the head cannot say to the feet, "I don't need you!"*

*On the contrary, those parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable, and the parts that we think are less honorable we treat with special honor. And the parts that are unpresentable are treated with special modesty, while our presentable parts need no special treatment. But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it.*

**Challenge Yourself:**

Some people prefer to avoid the spotlight; others enjoy being the center of attention. Which type are you? How do you respond when you are challenged to fit into the opposite role?

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## Day 17: Unconditional Forgiveness

### Scripture: Colossians 3:13

*Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.*

### The Big Idea:

Simply put, to withhold forgiveness is to withhold grace and is therefore unworthy of a Christ-follower.

### Commentary:

Since Paul's recommendation to us is to forgive as Christ did, we'd do well to carefully consider the precedent set for us at Calvary, where Jesus asked his Father to "forgive them, for they know not what they do." What should we take from this account?

First, the act Jesus is making intercession for is his own judicial murder. Even more than that, it's the murder of God's Messiah. I think we can rightly label it the most heinous deed in all of human history, yet to Christ at least, the perpetrators still merited forgiveness.

In light of this, how can we ever justify clinging to bitterness and refusing to extend forgiveness to anyone based on a claim that their actions are too terrible to forgive? Christ's precedent shatters that argument to pieces.

Next, Christ alludes to the ignorance of his executioners. I suspect that this is the case in the vast majority of instances in which someone causes pain to another person. Sure, it sometimes happens that the misdeed is premeditated; but far more often, I'm sure, the pain they've caused was unintentional. That doesn't make it hurt any less, but it does put it in a different perspective.

For one thing, it makes me wonder how often I've hurt someone else and never even realized it. If someone can hurt me unintentionally, then I can do the same to them. Am I really the monster they think I am? Are they? Do neither of us deserve forgiveness?

Years ago when I was in college I was waiting for class to begin when a casual friend entered, furious with me. She said I should be ashamed of myself and she never wanted to talk with me again.

Stunned and puzzled, I asked what I had done to offend her. "You know perfectly well," she snapped. To this day I have no idea what I did. I felt terrible and wished I could undo things, but without knowing what I had done in the first place, it was hard to know where to start.

I suspect that's how it is with most grudges. The offending party has no idea they've caused pain, and certainly never meant to. They'd undo

things if they could. On what basis do we have the right to deny them forgiveness? If Christ finds no such basis, can we?

But more than that, Christ’s whole mission on earth was to provide a basis for the forgiveness of *all* our sins. That’s the whole reason he was willing to hang on that cross. It would have been self-contradictory not to forgive his executioners. Even God can’t both forgive and not forgive at the same time.

Of course, you may say, “Well, that was Christ’s mission; it’s not mine. I’m not God; I shouldn’t be expected to act like him.” But that’s not true. Granted, we’re not God, but we are expected to act like him, to the fullest extent we can:

**1 Peter 2:21**

*Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*

In what sense are we “followers of Christ” if not in the love we show toward others, especially in the midst of suffering?

No doubt, all of this is very difficult for most of us. Why? Because holding a grudge gives us a sense of control over those who have offended us. It provides us with the strangely comforting notion that they are in need of something that only we can offer, and by withholding it we put them at a disadvantage. In a word, we use their own sense of guilt as a weapon against them. Such a strategy is often effective at satisfying our desire for retribution, but it is never Christ-like.

**Challenge Yourself:**

How easy or hard do you find forgiveness? Are you living with an offense that needs to be forgiven?

Are you aware of any offenses of which you are guilty and need to apologize? If so, are you ready to do so?

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## ***PART THREE: Submission of subjects to rulers***

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### **Day 18: Established by God**

#### **Scripture: Romans 13:1-2**

*Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves.*

#### **The Big Idea:**

Because God stands behind human authorities, submission to civil government is submission to him.

#### **Commentary:**

Today's passage from Paul's letter to the Roman church is another of those that challenges some of the ideals that we as Americans hold dear. Our Declaration of Independence expounds the right—even the duty—of oppressed people to cast off unjust rulers by force.

But this passage does not challenge Americans alone. Did Paul's words compel the German people to support the Nazi Regime? What of German activists like Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who actively opposed Hitler and worked for his overthrow?

We feel instinctively that God surely would not have his children support such an unrighteous government, but is there biblical justification for this visceral feeling? Reassuringly, there is. When the Jewish leaders interrogated the apostles after the Ascension and warned them to stop preaching the gospel, their reply provides some perspective on the issue of submission to ruling authorities:

#### **Acts 4:19**

*But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God."*

Luke's account doesn't specify how the Sanhedrin responded to this challenge, but the Apostles' actions spoke clearly as to their own understanding of the priorities of a child of God: they continued preaching in defiance of the authorities.

In order to form a better understanding of a proper relationship between citizens and their rulers, we need to go back to the moment that Paul refers to when he describes human government as an authority instituted by God:

**Genesis 9:5b-6**

*“From each man, too, I will demand an accounting for the life of his fellow man. Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God has God made man.”*

In reference to this passage, Bible commentator Cyrus Scofield noted:

Man is not individually to avenge murder but, as a corporate group, he is to safeguard the sanctity of human life as a gift of God which cannot rightly be disposed of except as God permits.” In other words, governors are God’s appointed representatives charged with protecting his children by ensuring the personal agendas and vendettas don’t trump universal justice.

To the extent that rulers recognize and are true to this mission, we are bound to respect them as instruments of God’s will. But it is of course possible, even common, for human governors to succumb to human weaknesses and to abandon God’s justice in favor of their own ends. When this happens, we are bound to ask once again the question of Peter and John, “Is it right to obey man or God?”

A danger is that while it is common for human rulers to stray from God’s blueprint for just governance, it is equally tempting for those who are displeased with their rulers to too easily make such a charge a pre-tense for rebellion. We should always err on the side of submission when it comes to obedience to human governments or we will make rebellion the norm when it should remains always the exception to the rule.

**Challenge Yourself:**

Learn the story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. What specific Nazi policies convinced him that obeying God required him to defy Hitler? Would you have done the same in his place?

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## Day 19: Beating the Bounds

### Scripture: Romans 12:9-10

*Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.*

### The Big Idea:

Submission to others does not mean we need to embrace what is clearly wrong, nor abandon anything that is intrinsically good.

### Commentary:

In ancient England, “beating the bounds” was an annual rite. The local parish priest and a handful of church officials walked the borders of the parish, maintaining the boundary lines by clearing away any brush or obstructions that had overgrown the boundary markers during the course of the previous year and replacing any that had been moved. (Often one of the party would read aloud Deuteronomy 27:17: “Cursed is the man who moves his neighbor’s boundary stone.”) In this way the extent of the local parish’s authority was continually preserved.

Boundaries exist within the discipline of submission as well; boundaries that must be maintained if we are not to go beyond what scripture intends. Perhaps the most important application pertains to our level of obligation to clearly unrighteous rulers.

While God established the institution of human government and delegated to it the authority to rule as his earthly representative, it does not follow that all persons who presume to step into that role and wield its power are servants of God. In lesson 3 we briefly considered one of the most notable biblical examples of just such a ruler. The Pharaoh of the Exodus revealingly replied to Moses’ demand to free the Hebrews by saying, “Who is the LORD, that I should obey him and let Israel go? I do not know the LORD and I will not let Israel go.” Even at that early date, Pharaoh was not the first governor who did not know God or respect his authority, and world history abounds with subsequent examples as well.

Many have observed that “The Devil can cite scripture for his own purposes.” And just as Satan can take the pure and righteous word of God and pervert it to his own ends, so too can the God-ordained institution of government be usurped and misused by God’s enemies. When the Bible tells us to respect earthly rulers because they have been put in place by God, we need not think this applies to such exceptional cases, but only to the institution in its original, undistorted form. When governments fail to work towards achieving God’s purposes rather than their own, they no longer can claim the respect and loyalty the Bible speaks of.

As with so many of the deeper things of God, this truth requires us to be sober, mature, and discerning. Clearly, Nazi morality deviates from God’s standard and therefore falls outside the norm. But rarely are rulers so blatantly evil as Hitler. Where do we set the bounds?

Does one ungodly policy—say a government’s laws pertaining to abortion—justify a lack of submission to its authority, especially when many of its other laws embody freedoms and guarantees of personal protection that are far more godly than not? And how much grace and forgiveness are we called to extend to rulers? Should we, as we are commanded to do toward our neighbor, forgive them seventy-seven times?

These are challenging questions and we’re unlikely to all agree on what constitutes the best answer. Disagreement over extreme examples, though, should not derail us from obeying those aspects of biblical instruction on submission that are less explosive. And really, most of our gripes about earthly governments fall into this category. On a typical day, we’re more likely to complain about paying our taxes than about more delicate issues of morality. We boil over about the township authority’s failure to fix the pothole in front of our home, or conversely, about its tendency to spend too much money on road maintenance on the other side of town. Rather than fight the steady decline of morality reflected in new legislation, we spend our time and energy fighting the traffic ticket we got the other day when we were late for work and bent (very justifiably of course) the traffic laws just a tiny bit.

These and similar occasions are ones in which our submission to authority is more likely to be tested, and resistance is less appropriate. We can begin practicing submission in these mundane moments of life, at least, while we continue to struggle over the weightier, intransigent ones.

**Challenge Yourself:**

Can you think of any laws passed by your local, state, or national leaders that might, in your opinion, lie outside of God’s will? How have you personally responded to such laws?

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## Day 20: Let Conscience Be Your Guide

### Scripture: Romans 13:5-6

*Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also because of conscience. This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing.*

### The Big Idea:

Submission to authority should be motivated not just by a desire to avoid punishment, but by the desire to do right.

### Commentary:

Often, we have too narrow a conception of what law is all about. We view it as a list of do's and don'ts that we are compelled to adhere to if we wish to stay out of legal trouble and escape punishment. That's why it seems to me that the degree to which any given law is respected has far less to do with whether or not it is just, than with whether we're likely to get caught if we break it.

I cannot prove this hypothesis, but it seems self-evident: The reason pirating software and DVDs is so prevalent can't be that so many people feel moral outrage over the concept of protecting an artist's rights to earn a profit from his own labor. Surely it's because there's virtually no risk of being caught in this particular form of thievery. That's why even Christians are so prone to it. We speed not because there's anything morally repugnant about traffic laws, but because there are no traffic cops anywhere in sight. (I confess that as far as this one at least, I can speak with absolute authority!)

But the law, whether it's God's law or civil law, is about more than staying out of trouble. God's laws describe to us the kind of lifestyle that sets children of God apart from those who live for themselves. Civil law embodies the sort of behavior that benefits society as a whole by restraining the human tendency to put self first. That's why we often bristle at the laws that govern us; they hinder us from the uninhibited exercise of our selfish human nature. Assuming the laws are just, it's for our own good—but that's hard to remember when our base instincts are being frustrated.

As long as we insist upon our freedom to choose our own course, we'll never be satisfied living under law, and the only motivation we will have for obedience will be the fear of punishment. This concern is what prompted many renaissance-era church authorities to react in horror to Martin Luther's message that salvation is by faith and not works and that

faith in Christ frees us from the burden of the law. In that case, they responded, what's to prevent the people from running riot across Europe?

The answer, of course, is that there is a second nature in addition to the sin nature that is at work in the hearts of sincere Christ-followers:

**Galatians 5:16-18**

*So I say, live by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the sinful nature. For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under law.*

Those who live for Christ rather than themselves see law as an outline for a life that pleases the one they most desire to please, rather than as limitations imposed to stifle us and which bring punishment if we're not very careful. In an age of grace, the question is no longer "Is the law fair?" or "Will I get caught?" but "How can I make God smile?" And the law gives us insight into what delights God. (As today's verse also reminds us, "law" includes not just the words written in the Bible, but the law imprinted onto our hearts in the form of an inner sense, or conscience, that speaks to us internally and reminds us of God's will and His ways.)

Of course, because God knows far better than we do what is best for us, living according to his word not only enables us to please him; it results in a healthier, richer life brimming with God's blessings. This doesn't mean we never face crises, because crises too, are good for us in their own way. Without difficult challenges we'd be spiritual children all our lives, untrained in the virtues of patience, courage, integrity, and sacrifice. So not all that is uncomfortable or challenging is bad.

**Challenge Yourself:**

1 Corinthians 6:12 says: "Everything is permissible for me—but not everything is beneficial. 'Everything is permissible for me—but I will not be mastered by anything.'" What is your understanding of these words?

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## Day 21: Such as These

### Scripture: 1 Corinthians 16:15-16

*You know that the household of Stephanas were the first converts in Achaia, and they have devoted themselves to the service of the saints. I urge you, brothers, to submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work, and labors at it.*

### The Big Idea:

Those who are servants deserve our humble gratitude and support.

### Commentary:

Paul's urgent suggestion to the church in Rome is a very sensible one, albeit one too often ignored. We live in a society that stresses hierarchical command structures and delegates authority accordingly. This can be either a good thing or a bad thing, depending on how our leaders exercise their authority. Some leadership styles deserve our respect; others not so much.

One common leadership quality is raw power. "Might makes right" is a model of authority to which those without power may have no choice but to submit. But forced submission is not a virtue, and such a standard of authority is hardly the best system upon which to base a system of government. Nor is it the one Paul advocates.

Paul relies instead on another old dictum; one introduced by Jesus: "So the last will be first, and the first will be last (Matthew 20:16)." By the last, Jesus meant those not normally considered to have authority by the people of his day, nor of ours. While servants were on the lowest rung of our earthly society's ladder, they had the place of honor in God's kingdom. Their authority comes not from might of the usual sort, but from having a heart of compassion, willing hands, and a fierce determination to do what needs to be done.

In his introduction to *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis notes that: "Ever since I served as an infantryman in the First World War I have had a great dislike of people who, themselves in ease and safety, issue exhortations to men in the front line." I think we can all understand why, and Jesus seems to agree. Real moral authority, he suggests, is embodied in the ones who are putting themselves in harm's way. It's a good thing to speak out against evil in the abstract. It's far better and more exemplary to get your hands dirty fighting injustice up close. The ones who accept that challenge are the real authority figures, and we need to submit to them, more so than to scholars or theoreticians.

It's easy to visualize this in a battlefield situation such as Lewis suggests. But it is equally true, if sometimes harder to visualize, in God's

kingdom. Thus, seminary degrees are a good thing. They reflect an advanced level of training to serve in God's kingdom. But submission is owed first and foremost to those who are not just trained, but active. This may include those with formal education, but it will also include others trained only in the school of experience.

If this seems obvious, I would agree; but I would also add that while obvious, it seems to me to be a truth too seldom reflected in our actual relationships with our Christian brothers and sisters. We need to be more willing to take our lead from those who have committed their lives to Christian service and less eager to impose our preferences from a position of "ease and safety." Those who have demonstrated the Christ-like willingness to perform sacrificial service on behalf of others have earned the right to be heard and deserve respect. To the extent that their lives are exemplary, we need to follow their example and hold them up as models of Christian leadership, not impede their work with undue criticism because it does not conform to some theoretical model.

Of course, there is another side to leadership. We must also hold leaders accountable, especially when they abuse the authority they've been given. But just as respect must be earned, so must criticism, and if we are slow with shows of respect, we should be slower yet with criticism. Humility should caution us not to presume that we are in the right every time a disagreement arises.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge had a dictum that guided his work as an editor, which we'd do well to use as a guide in our opinions of servants of Christ: "When we meet an apparent error in a good author, we are to presume ourselves ignorant of his understanding, until we are certain that we understand his ignorance." When it comes to servant leaders who have repeatedly sharpened their skills and their understanding of ministry on the front lines of service, it is usually prudent to honor their battle-tested insights.

**Challenge Yourself:**

When we disagree with a servant leader's style of leadership, how can we go about assuring ourselves that we "understand his ignorance" before acting?

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## Day 22: Unjust Suffering

### Scripture: 1 Peter 2:18-19

*Slaves, submit yourselves to your masters with all respect, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. For it is commendable if a man bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because he is conscious of God.*

### The Big Idea:

The workplace can be the perfect place to model God's grace toward the undeserving.

### Commentary:

In the previous lesson we considered the submission due to those who hold authority over us by virtue of their hardworking dedication to living a life of Christian service. Now we'll look at those situations in which someone's authority over us is based on a hierarchical command structure rather than an exemplary character.

We'll consider the difficult issue of slavery later in this study. For now, when we talk about masters and servants, I want to confine our thoughts to the more common relationship between an employer and employee. Most of us have at one time or another had a boss that was difficult to work under. Likewise, many of us will have no trouble recalling times when we were in a supervisory capacity over difficult employees. These are among the most frustrating yet common examples of strained relationships that the Bible nevertheless calls us to approach with an attitude of submission.

As with many aspects of the Christian life, this one is easier to talk about in abstract terms than to live out in your real-world workplace. Peter's advice, though, provides a useful strategy we can employ: Focus on God rather than the human boss we struggle so to please. This is more than a clever mind game. Scripture confirms that even though by all outward appearances we may be working for a mean-spirited tyrant or a bumbler, at a deeper level we are, in fact, serving the Lord:

### Colossians 3:23-24

*Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*

When we accept Jesus as our Savior and invite him into our hearts and our lives, we turn our *entire* life over to him. He doesn't offer us the option of giving him our Sundays only and reserving the rest of the week

for ourselves. Or of giving him our “spiritual” lives, but keeping our business affairs under our own management.

Our relationships, too, should reflect God’s presence in our lives. The way we interact with others in the workplace has the potential to either glorify our God or dishonor him. This can be a heavy responsibility, but it can also be helpful, when dealing with a difficult person, to remember that it is Christ you are ultimately working for, and that the difficult boss or uncooperative subordinate you so often want to lash out at may be the lost soul God sent you into the world to save. She or she may, in fact, be your primary mission in life.

For years I have carried around in my head an idea for a short story that illustrates just this possibility. It’s the tale of a sincere Christian who is hounded throughout much of his adult life by an abrasive pest. It seems like no matter how often he tries to change scenery, this nuisance of a neighbor pops up. The unwanted “friend” shows up uninvited at backyard barbecues, vacations in the same hotel, and gets a job in the very same office as our victimized protagonist, and all the time his crude, in-your-face mannerisms are a torment. In time the civil Christian dies and is ushered into God’s presence. Grateful for a long life and a caring family, he has just one bone to pick with his Lord. You guessed it, he wants to know what he did to deserve such a bothersome “thorn in the flesh” as his obnoxious neighbor and co-worker. God patiently responds, “That fellow was not a punishment I inflicted upon you; he was a lost soul that needed guidance. I tirelessly put him in your path time and time again, hoping you’d reach out to him and show him kindness on my behalf. But you never did.”

I wonder how often as we go through life we pass up divine appointments arranged by God as opportunities to serve him by showing grace to those who do not yet understand its nature—whether in the workplace or anywhere.

### **Challenge Yourself:**

What do you think of the idea that God might place difficult people in your lives so that they might perhaps be convicted by the kindness with which you repay them?

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## ***PART FOUR: Submission of creature to Creator***

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### **Day 23: Stubborn Hearts**

#### **Scripture: Psalm 81:10-12**

*I am the LORD your God, who brought you up out of Egypt. Open wide your mouth and I will fill it.*

*But my people would not listen to me; Israel would not submit to me.*

*So I gave them over to their stubborn hearts to follow their own devices.*

#### **The Big Idea:**

There is an important distinction between submission and slavery.

#### **Commentary:**

It's hard for those of us who are aware of some of the darker episodes of modern history to put the Bible's references to slavery into a proper perspective. Most often, when the Bible refers to slaves and masters, the relationship being described does not parallel that which was typical in the ante-bellum southern United States.

Many of the things that made American slavery especially evil were not a part of more ancient practices. First, in ancient Israel slavery was not tied to race or to social class. Hebrews as well as foreigners might be slaves, as could well-educated professionals. But no one was condemned to a life of slavery because of the circumstances of their birth. Often, slavery was a way of working off a debt. A very loose modern analogy might be a patron of a restaurant who is made to wash dishes because he can't pay the bill. Another example is that of Jacob serving Laban for 14 years for the privilege of marrying his daughters. There was no sense of inferiority attached to this form of servanthood. It was more like a business deal—a form of barter.

Then as in a later age, masters could be abusive. But this was far from the norm. In fact, Hebrew law even provided guidelines for what to do in cases where a slave's term of service was over, but he or she didn't want to leave the master's house:

#### **Exodus 21:2,5-6**

*If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything.... But if the servant declares, "I love my master and my wife and children and do not want to go free," then his master must take him before the judges. He shall take him to the door or the doorpost and pierce his ear with an awl. Then he will be his servant for life.*

Piercing the servant's ear was a mark of identification; a way of signifying that this person had freely chosen to remain in a mutually beneficial relationship with his master.

In a way, when God brought his people up out of Egypt, he was leading them out of an experience of slavery not very dissimilar to African slavery closer to our own time, and into a covenant resembling the one described in this passage from Exodus. He was inviting them to cast off involuntary, prejudicial, and destructive servitude in favor of a freely chosen love relationship—one still characterized by submission, but a submission that was not coerced, but gladly given.

This freely offered servitude is exactly what Christ invites His church to experience.

**Matthew 11:28-30**

*“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light.”*

This is a call to experience the release and security that comes from submitting ourselves to One we know we can ultimately trust. It's similar to slavery in the sense that it puts us at someone else's disposal, but it's the opposite of slavery as we typically understand it in the sense that it focuses on the fulfillment of the servant rather than the master. And while it calls for humility on the part of the servant, it is the master who most profoundly humbles himself:

**Philippians 2:8**

*And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!*

**Challenge Yourself:**

When, in your relationship with God, have you been moved to serve him through a sense of appreciation, rather than in response to the Law? Contrarily, can you think of a time when you refrained from acting in a particular way not because the Bible says “Thou shalt not,” but because you knew it would displease Him?

**Notes:**

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## Day 24: Pierced

### Scripture: Psalm 40:6-8

*Sacrifice and offering you did not desire, but my ears you have pierced; burnt offerings and sin offerings you did not require. Then I said, "Here I am, I have come—it is written about me in the scroll. I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart."*

### The Big Idea:

Obedience to God's law is a fine thing; the *desire* to please God is better still.

### Commentary:

Today's scripture passage embodies the distinctions we considered in the previous lesson between two forms of servanthood. In the Psalms, David observes that the nature of his relationship with God is not one of cowed obedience to a despot who enjoys seeing us grovel for the sake of his own dignity. Rather, David correctly understands his Lord as one who gladly receives those who freely come into his presence. Because there is a choice, we have freedom. Because we choose to come, we have submission. The two exist side by side. It's that easy.

This is also the answer to the claim Satan made in the Garden of Eden. Yes, the freedom to choose *can* make us like rival gods if we use our freedom to plot our own course or to distance ourselves from God. But it doesn't have to be that way. Submission infuses freedom with an ability to draw us closer to the heart of God and give him far more joy than would ever have been possible had we not been able to choose.

We see this in human relationships all the time. Consider a mother who desperately wants her rebellious child to be better behaved and especially to stay out of trouble when she's not around. There are at least two ways this might be accomplished. She might easily prevent bad behavior by tying her son to a chair, placing duct tape across his mouth, and leaving him in that state until she returns. When she does, she will undoubtedly find that he has gotten into no mischief. But will that fact generate any affectionate feelings toward her son? Hardly. Such a relationship might work in the sense that it accomplishes the mother's purpose, but it would not be one worth celebrating and neither party could be expected to draw any satisfaction from it.

Another far more risky strategy would be for the mom to painstakingly explain why she desires her son to behave in a certain way. She might try to persuade him that certain kinds of behaviors might seem to yield positive results in the short term, but lead to long-term conflict and aggravation. No doubt, if she chooses this option, there will be a lot of

missteps. The son will test his freedoms to see what he can get away with, and sometimes the mother will have to fall back again on the force of law to teach her son of the consequences of improper behavior and remind him of the cost.

But if the mother can persevere and if the son is not a complete reprobate, in time the hard lesson will be learned and the son’s behavior will slowly be transformed. When this happens, the relationship can begin to really take off. Now when the mother returns from a hard day to find that the son has not misbehaved, she feels warmth for him growing inside her, just because she knows that he could have misbehaved, but freely chose not to. She’s likely to be so overjoyed at this little success that she rewards her son in some small way, reinforcing for him her message that good behavior pays off. Soon, when the mother comes home, she may even find that not only has her son not been misbehaving, he’s actually done the dishes while she was away!

Now I’m not naïve enough to think that parenting is really this easy or so straightforward, but you see the idea. And this is just how God has chosen to parent us. The Bible is essentially the long history of God’s parenting strategy—a record of his grace, tempered by occasional hard lessons, our failures, and (very slowly, because we’re often not too smart) heartening indications that we’re learning to love God in return, just as David did. Such love typically expresses itself in a desire to please God, quite apart from any law or threat of punishment.

So it is, I think, perfectly legitimate to suggest that our willingness to submit ourselves to God is in direct proportion to our spiritual maturity—our personal level of understanding and appreciation for the huge investment God has made in our upbringing.

**Challenge Yourself:**

Can you think of some ways we might express appreciation for all God has done, beyond simple obedience?

**Notes:**

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## Day 25: Zeal without Knowledge

### Scripture: Romans 10:1-3

*Brothers, my heart's desire and prayer to God for the Israelites is that they may be saved. For I can testify about them that they are zealous for God, but their zeal is not based on knowledge. Since they did not know the righteousness that comes from God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness.*

### The Big Idea:

Love often impels us to act precipitously. But passion is no excuse for impulsiveness. Rather, we do well to wait upon God for guidance.

### Commentary:

It's said that the road to hell is paved with good intentions. So is a domineering, manipulative insistence on having things done our way. Rarely, I think, are we motivated by dastardly, nefarious schemes when we fail to submit to others; we simply and genuinely believe that our way of thinking is the best way, or even the only way.

In college, I wrote for the college newspaper for the better part of three semesters before resigning over some issues that the Editor-in-Chief and I couldn't see eye-to-eye on. When a faculty advisor asked me what had prompted my resignation, I replied, "They kept wanting to do things their way, and I kept insisting that we do them right!" I'm glad to say that I was not serious when I said it. (To this day I still think it's a clever answer....) But too often that's really the way we feel. We suppose that we know best and any other way, insofar as it deviates from our own preference or understanding, is wrong. In this way, we can easily justify even the most mule-headed refusal to submit. After all, we reason, it's a sign of moral weakness to give in to what we know to be wrong.

The problem is that more often than not our knowledge of what is wrong and right is faulty. In fact, it's not really knowledge at all; it's just passion. We speak in terms of "what's right," but truth be told, we rarely have a firm basis for our definition of right. Deep down under all the posturing, we're really just reacting to our personal moods.

Paul acknowledges that this is what the Israelites were doing. Their intentions were good. They sincerely believed they were in the right. After all, they had good cause to be hesitant when anyone came along claiming divine authority. They'd gone down that path before and gotten burned. The Old Testament tells the story of what happened when they'd been too welcoming to new religious ideas and too accommodating to foreign notions of divinity. Their acceptance of false Gods resulted in

God’s wrath and centuries of exile in Assyria and Babylon. No wonder they said “no thanks” when this Nazarene Carpenter came to town.

But their knowledge let them down. They didn’t understand the kind of Messiah that prophecy was preparing them for. This time it was the real deal, and because they drew the wrong lesson from their experience of exile, they rejected him. Out of a sincere desire to please God, they ultimately crucified him.

The Israelites weren’t the only ones prone to such mistakes. An almost identical assumption led Pope Leo X to consider Martin Luther an enemy. There’s an especially insightful scene in the biographical movie, *Luther*, in which a newly appointed papal aide is being escorted through the Vatican. As he passes statues of former Popes, his guide points out the earthly temptations that prevented each man from fulfilling the high hopes he had brought to the papacy. Finally the guide asks the new appointee, “So what is it that *you* most want to achieve?” The appointee, thinking he’s learned the lesson, says he wants to serve God with all his heart. The guide responds, “Then that is how *you* will be tempted.” In other words, Satan will persuade him that all his opinions, plans, and priorities are holy, and that all other viewpoints are necessarily ungodly and therefore a threat.

A major step toward embracing the discipline of submission, then, is to acknowledge that we just might be wrong—even in those moments when we feel so right—and refrain from precipitous action based on questionable justifications. Stated another way, we need to question our own preferences as often as we question those of our neighbors.

**Challenge Yourself:**

Have you ever been absolutely sure you knew what was best for God and His church? Have you ever subsequently been proven wrong? Do you ever find it hard to apologize? Why?

**Notes:**

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## Day 26: “Consider What You Intend”

### Scripture: Acts 5:34-39

*A Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed them: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered.*

*“Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”*

### The Big Idea:

We unleash our spirit of submission whenever we take a deep breath and count to ten.

### Commentary:

When it came to avoiding the dangers of unrestrained zeal, the champion of the apostolic age was not a Christian, but was among those commonly considered enemies of Christ. As we’ll see, while he was mistaken about Jesus, he was no enemy of God.

The early chapters of the Acts of the Apostles tells the story of the Church before it had spread beyond the narrow confines of Jerusalem. Following the Day of Pentecost and motivated by the Holy Spirit, the apostles had barely begun proclaiming Jesus as the prophesied Messiah.

This was a message the Jewish authorities did not receive gladly, and they responded by arresting the preachers and bringing them before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council. Because they had already received a first warning, and had in fact previously been jailed for their preaching, the authorities pointedly asked why they hadn’t gotten the point. We’ve already considered Peter’s response—that submission to God trumps obedience to human rulers whenever the two conflict.

Now it’s time to reflect on what happened next. One of the most respected Jewish scholars of his day, a man named Gamaliel, offered his colleagues some surprising advice. In effect, he said, “Let God be the judge of what’s right.” Rather than exert force, which the council certainly could have done quite effectively, he acknowledged a truth that is

hard to admit: Crazy as it seems, there is a slight possibility that we are wrong, no matter how passionately we feel we are right.

It's interesting how commentators analyzing this incident have reached varying conclusions about Gamaliel's advice. Some see it as evidence of a wisdom no less impressive than Solomon's. Others sneer at his naiveté, noting that he frittered away a golden opportunity to suppress Christianity once and for all before it had even outgrown the cradle.

Which of these opinions you hold reflects how you view the discipline of submission. If God's will is less important to you than coming out on top in any confrontation, you'll likely side with those who consider Gamaliel a fool. But if you agree with the premise behind this study, you are bound to praise him for not rushing to judgment and letting his zeal get the better of him. Jesus himself predicted that this would often be the case when he told his disciples: "A time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God." But Gamaliel, at least, was not the fulfillment of this prophesy. Sadly, it's not always so, and Jesus' words have come true on countless occasions.

Of course, there is another danger diametrically opposed to precipitate action, which is perpetual *inaction*. Gamaliel's advice to "leave the matter alone" should not lead us to think that the best course of action in any dispute is to sit idle while we wait for a miracle or some indisputable evidence of God's will. God doesn't typically work that way. He has blessed us with intelligence to reason things out, and he expects us to use it. He guides us through gentle promptings of the Holy Spirit, but he rarely shouts. Our best course is to pause long enough to consider our intentions: Do they conform to scripture? Do they cohere with what we know about God's plans? Do they embody the compassionate, merciful nature of our Lord? Most importantly, do other mature Christians generally corroborate our assessment? If so, then we may feel free to act—not as though we've received any guarantee that we are acting wisely, but humbly inviting God to correct any missteps we might take.

### **Challenge Yourself:**

Can you think of any times when yourself or others were blessed because you refrained from acting on your passions?

### **Notes:**

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## Day 27: Seeking God in Everything

### Scripture: 2 Chronicles 31:20-21

*This is what Hezekiah did throughout Judah, doing what was good and right and faithful before the LORD his God. In everything that he undertook in the service of God's temple and in obedience to the law and the commands, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly. And so he prospered.*

### The Big Idea:

Seeking God is not something to be put off until times of crisis. It is equally important to value His guidance in the routine moments of life.

### Commentary:

When King Hezekiah took the throne of Judah, godly submission was far from commonplace throughout the kingdom. In fact, much of the nation had sunk into idolatry and abandoned the God of their forefathers. Hezekiah was determined to give his people a fresh start, so he sent emissaries throughout the realm, inviting his people to gather in Jerusalem to renew the covenant their God had made with them by joining together for a national Passover celebration, the like of which hadn't been seen in years. "Do not be stiff-necked, as your fathers were," he urged, but rather "submit to the LORD." As you might guess, some responded favorably, but many did not.

Next, Hezekiah set about destroying pagan temples and reinstated the tithe so that the priests could devote themselves fully to their duties unburdened by any worries about providing for themselves. To this call, the response was overwhelming.

Hezekiah didn't know it, but a crisis was fast approaching. An Assyrian army would soon invade Judah and besiege Jerusalem. When such disasters overtake us, desperation has a way of compelling even the most short-sighted of us to humble ourselves before God and ask for divine intervention. Hezekiah's particular virtue lay in his willingness to seek God even before the Assyrians appeared on the horizon. His act of submission grew not out of desperate emergency, but out of the normal routine of a life centered on God.

One normal aspect of life that we too often fail to submit to God's guidance is marriage. I got lucky when it came to finding a wife. A recent college graduate, just starting a career, I gave little thought to how important it was to have a partner who was a spiritual match. I was responding only to an emotional attraction. That's the way most young men stumble into marriage, I suspect. And women too. Fresh out of high school or college, most of us are spiritually immature, and too infre-

quently do we take faith into account when making the most important and far-reaching decision of our lives. Only in retrospect, many long years later perhaps, but maybe far sooner, do we look back and know for sure whether we made a dreadful mistake or, more happily, forged a union that not only brings personal satisfaction but also bears fruit for God's kingdom.

It may well be that God sent my wife Susan into my life as part of His plan, but if so, I didn't pick up on it at the time. Only now, after grieving with close friends who have struggled through painful divorces, do I realize how foolish I was, and how blessed that I bumped into a relationship with the right woman, one whose faith has grown alongside my own and who is a partner not just at home but in ministry as well.

Fathers often know better. Certainly Abraham did when it came to finding a bride for his son Isaac. He sent a servant back to his own country with instructions to find a suitable woman and most of all, to rely upon God to reveal who that might be.

My own dad succumbed to cancer when I was 13. Maybe if he'd been there to advise me, I'd have formulated a different set of criteria by which to choose a wife. Probably not. Few of us at that age take our parents' guidance as seriously as it deserves. And that goes for our heavenly Father as well. By the time I became a father myself, I knew enough to pray for the wisdom to be a good one, much as Solomon prayed for the wisdom to rule justly. But in the days and months leading up to my marriage, I went it alone, never thinking to seek God's guidance or to submit my choice to his approval.

This principle should, of course, not be confined just to marriages, but should govern our choices in regard to finances, employment opportunities, and of course our personal ministry. Submission and prayer in these everyday practical issues of life provides a solid foundation for a fruitful and satisfying future.

### **Challenge Yourself:**

Do you make it a habit to pray over the choices you face in the course of everyday living?

### **Notes:**

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## ***CONCLUSION***

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### **Day 28: Reverence for Christ**

#### **Scripture: Ephesians 5:21**

*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*

#### **The Big Idea:**

Submit to others or resist God; these are our only alternatives.

#### **Commentary:**

On one occasion on which I urged some senior members of a small rural congregation to allow several young adults the freedom to express worship using music that the seniors considered too non-traditional, the response from one was, “Why should I?”

Recognizing from her tone that she was not genuinely interested in learning about the discipline of submission, but that her question was in fact a declaration of her refusal to bend, I made no answer. As I hope I’ve demonstrated during the course of this study, winning an argument is not the point; rather, spiritual maturity requires us to go out of our way to accommodate others.

If, though, I had been compelled to frame a response, it would have been the above words to the church in Ephesus, penned by the Apostle Paul. For all our eloquent words, it really all comes down to this simple truth: God himself calls us to a lifestyle characterized by acts of submission. When we comply, we bring him honor and declare our allegiance. When we don’t, we can no longer truly claim to be his obedient children.

But powerful though this reason is, it is not the only way to justify an attitude of submission. If holiness fails to adequately motivate you, then consider the following story:

Back when I was in college, a few close friends and I went through a phase when we were questioning our self-image and together we got the notion that we needed to overcome some sort of physical challenge in order to confirm our self-worth. Someone suggested that we go white water rafting.

None of us had any experience in this kind of thing, and our river guides didn’t really give us much instruction on handling our raft before we set off, but they did tell us what to do if we fell out. They said, “If you find yourself in the river, you’re going to think, ‘Hey, the water is only a couple of feet deep. All I need to do is stand up.’” But then they explained that trying to stand is the *worst* thing you can do. The current in the rapids is so strong that even though the river is shallow, it’s impossible to stand. If we tried, they said, we’d be likely to get a foot pinned un-

der a rock, and if that happened the current would pull us under. Instead, they told us, the right thing to do was keep our feet up and just point them downstream. They said our lifejackets would keep our heads above water, and if we just went limp and let the current take us, we'd float safely through the rapids and into calmer water.

Armed with this advice we set off downriver. Soon we were heading into a stretch of river called Mile-Long Rapids. Directly in front of us was another raft, and directly in front of that was a huge rock. The raft ahead of us hit the rock, grounded, and came to a sudden stop. We in turn ran directly over top of them and capsized.

The next thing I knew I was face up in the river, thinking, "Hey, the water's only a couple of feet deep. All I need to do is stand up." So I tried. In fact, I tried twice. But the guides had been right: it was impossible to stand up in the rapid current. And my life started to flash before my eyes.

But then I remembered what the guides had told us to do. I stopped struggling and put my feet up. And within another 10 or 15 seconds the current had carried me out of the rapids and into calm water, where I was able to climb back into my raft, breathless but unharmed.

That's what the discipline of submission is like. Every day we're caught in a losing battle to maintain control. We can grit our teeth and spend our days in fruitless struggle, investing anger and frustration in a losing fight, or we can keep our feet up and enjoy the ride. And more often than not, if we are willing to submit, we'll find that before long the undertow subsides and the waters grow still and we are free to reassert ourselves without a battle.

Why should we submit? Because far more often than not it results in a happier, less tumultuous personal life. Because by giving up a life of constant struggle, we are the big winners.

### **Challenge Yourself:**

Do you have a personal story to tell about submission? If so, share it with the group.

Submission can be a blessing, but can you think of time when "going with the flow" is *not* a good idea?

### **Notes:**

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